The Moth Decides

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Wilhelm 45

Mary Reynolds

February - 1928 -

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THE MOTH DECIDES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

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THE MOTH DECIDES

A NOVEL

BY

EDWARD ALDEN JEWELL

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PART I

The Arrival

I

WHEN Louise opened her eyes she stared dreamily up at the slight abrasion in the shingle roof through which morning blinked. There were not many of these informal skylights, for the roof was not an old one. But there were a few, as there are likely to be in most summer cottages. When there was a violent downpour one had to hustle around distributing pans and kettles to catch an often ambitious drip. But this morning there was no rain. Louise's pretty face was not in danger of an unsolicited bath. It was a radiant summer dawn.

For a moment she wondered how she had happened to wake so early. The July birds were all chattering in the woods. But why should *she* waken out of deep slumber unsummoned? Presently, however, the reason for this phenomenon flashed vividly. Downstairs in the cottage living room, on the chimney-piece, stood an old Dutch clock. This clock possessed a kind of wiry, indignant tick, and a voice, when it was time to speak, full of a jerky, twanging spite. Louise could hear the sharp ticking. Then there came a little whirr—like a very wheeze of decrepitude—followed by an angry striking. One, two, three, four. And at the very first stroke

she knew why she was awake at so almost grotesque an hour. The remembrance brought its half whimsical shock. In an hour Leslie would be cranking the engine of his little launch, and they would be chugging toward Beulah.

However, even this did not impel the girl to spring out of bed. Indeed, she arose quite deliberately and only after a brief relapse into a dreaminess which was cousin to slumber itself. She allowed her mind to explore, quite fantastically and not a little extravagantly, the probable courses of the day just springing. She knew beyond any question that it was to be a day packed full of importance for her. Yet she proceeded with that air of cool possession which young persons often elect to display when they feel that the reins are snugly in their hands. As she looked up at the tiny point of aurora in the roof, Louise smiled. There was almost no trace left of the old trouble—that well borne but sufficiently poignant wound, which though her own, had added new lines to the Rev. Needham's already pictorial face. Richard? Oh, Richard was almost forgotten at length. This was as it should be. Defiantly, but also a little slyly (because it could hardly be reckoned a good Christian sentiment), Louise wished that Richard might somehow be here now to observe her triumph; above all—for the wound *had* still a slight sting—to see how finely calm she had learned to be in these matters.

There was a light step outside on the turf of the

hillside. One unalert might not have noted it, or might not have known it for a human tread, where there was such a patter of squirrel and chipmunk scampering. But Louise was alert. She might be calm, but she was also alert. And she knew it was no squirrel out there. That was Leslie. He was lingering about under her window, undecided whether he ought to risk pebbles or a judicious whistle by way of making sure she was awake. At the faint sound of his foot she raised her head quickly from the pillow.

"Louise!" he whispered.

You might have thought it some mere passing sibilance of wind. But you could not be expected to know Leslie's voice as she knew it.

The girl slipped softly out of bed. She did not want to rouse her sister. Hilda was sleeping with her. Hilda had given her own room to Aunt Marjie.

When Louise stepped out on to the bare cottage floor, her feet encountered cool little hillocks of sand, the residue of sundry bed-time shoe dumpings. One could not live up here beside Lake Michigan without coming to reckon sand as intimately and legitimately entering into almost every phase of existence. Indeed, she trod on sand more or less all the way across to the single little window; then dropped lightly on to her knees before the window and peered down through the screen.

"I'm awake, Leslie," she whispered.

And the lad who had been eagerly gazing at this

very window, vacant till now, smiled faintly, nodded, and made motions signifying that he would wait for her in the little rustic "tea-house." However, his smile was very brief; and his manner, as he went away toward the specified rendezvous, was manifestly dejected.

When Louise turned back from the window, Hilda was stirring. Hilda lifted herself up on to an elbow and welcomed her sister with bright eyes.

"Who's out there?" she asked.

"Sh-h-h! It's Les. Go back to sleep, Hilda."

"Is he going with you?" the younger girl persisted.

"Only part of the way."

"As far as Beulah?"

"Yes."

"Why doesn't he go all the way?"

"Because I would rather go alone," replied the older girl with a quite fascinating fusion of firmness and mystery.

But the manifest dignity of this response was slighted by Hilda, who merely remarked, in an unemotional yet still significant tone: "Oh, I see."

"Well, isn't it natural?"

"Isn't what natural, Lou?"

"Isn't it natural I should want to be alone when I meet Lynndal?"

"Oh, yes! I didn't just stop to think how it would be."

"Not that it would really matter about Les," the

other continued, slipping quickly into her clothes. "Les is only a boy, after all."

"Oh, do you think so, Lou?"

"Why, of course. Leslie isn't more than twenty, if he's *that*," she concluded rather doubtfully, twisting up her dark hair and fixing it loosely in place.

"Oh, he is!" protested Hilda as vigorously as whisper-talk would allow.

"Is what?"

"Les *is* twenty."

Louise had turned away from the larger mirror in the dresser and was trying to focus the back of her head with the aid of a small hand mirror, as women do who are particularly concerned about appearing at their best. She looked across oddly at her sister, who in turn blushed, lowering her eyes.

"Well, then, as you say. You seem to be pretty sure."

"Les told me he was," cried Hilda, as though vaguely to shift some sort of responsibility.

Louise relinquished the mirrors and sat down on the edge of the bed for the purpose of tying her shoes. "Listen, Hilda," she said; "you ought to go straight back to sleep. It's only four o'clock. Papa would be mad if he heard us."

"Oh, but he can't," replied Hilda, with the air of one who knows very accurately the acoustic properties of the house in which she dwells.

"But Aunt Marjie might," the other suggested.

"Oh, she wouldn't tell. Aunt Marjie's a sport! Besides," she added, as though to place the matter altogether beyond dispute, "listen!"

Both girls did. They gazed in silence toward the three-quarters partition beyond which Aunt Marjie was established. It was quite true. There were unmistakable dulcet sounds from that direction. Aunt Marjie had warned them she was a heavy sleeper. She had not deemed it urgent to be more specific.

"Safe!" admitted Louise, with a sigh of mock-relief, adding, however: "Even so, you ought to go back to sleep."

Hilda dropped on to her pillow, seeming without comment about to comply. But she was right up again with an earnest question: "Where's he now?"

"Who?"

"Les."

"Sh-h-h! He's waiting for me outside."

"Oh, Louise—I *wish* you'd let me go with you!" The emphasis implied that the petition had been put hitherto—perhaps persistently. "Please *do* let me go along—only as far as Beulah!"

The person so earnestly addresssed was dusting her face and neck with powder, which signified that she was about ready to depart. She flipped open her handkerchief box with a scene from Dresden on its cover and tucked a fresh handkerchief into her blouse. "Now be good and don't tease," she pleaded a little petulantly. Louise took a certain elder-sis-

terly attitude towards Hilda which had in it something of selfish authority.

Once more Hilda dropped obediently back. But as she lay there, very wide awake indeed, she couldn't help sighing: "Oh, how I should *love* to go to Beulah!" And there was another sigh to set it off.

Now, it might be supposed, from the fervour of the young girl's tone, that this Beulah, of which both had repeatedly spoken, must be a wonderfully and peculiarly charming place. Yes, it must indeed possess rare attributes to make a girl beg to be allowed to abandon her nice snug nest at dawn for a mere sight of it. And yet, curiously enough, Beulah was hardly charming in any actual sense: just a tiny, poky, dull little hole of a town, a poor speck on a minor railroad. All things considered, Louise's advice sounded very sensible: "You know you're better off here on the Point."

However, Hilda by no means thought so, and she shook her head with stolid vehemence.

"And I thought," her sister continued, paying very little attention to her own words, "I thought there was to be a tennis match this morning."

"Yes, there is," admitted Hilda.

"Well, you know they couldn't possibly play without you."

She forgot her phrases as fast as she uttered them. She was ploughing through her jewellery case for a certain brooch. It was one which Richard had given

her, and which had somehow been overlooked when the other gifts had been sent back to him at the Rev. Needham's firm request. She meant, if she could find it, to wear the brooch this morning. It might be Lynndal would show himself too sure of her. She *might* want to impress upon him the fact that her life had not been loveless. At length she found the ornament and put it on, with a little toss of coquetry. Of course Louise didn't mean really to hold off any regarding their engagement. Ah, no. That was a settled thing, as a glance at the correspondence must amply prove. Nevertheless, she decided on the brooch. Richard, with his faithlessness, had hacked two years right out of her life. But Louise had a new lover! The earlier affair was remote enough to stand a little harmless commercializing now.

Hilda modestly deprecated the enviable light in which her tennis playing had been put by her sister.

"You know that's not true!" she said.

"What isn't true?"

"What you said about them not being able to play the match without me. Besides," she concluded with a leap of thought which gave the words themselves a queer stamp of irrelevance, "*he's* going to play in it, *too*."

"Who is?" asked Louise blankly, brushing some strayed powder off her skirt.

"Leslie."

"Leslie? Well, I don't get the connection."

Hilda nodded quite violently. Her sleep-tossed

hair lay richly about her shoulders. One shoulder was bare, where the nightgown fell away from it. She was fresh and pretty. Perhaps not so pretty as Louise. But Hilda was only fifteen, just swinging into the earliest bloom of her womanhood.

"Yes," she explained, "Les is going to play in the match. He told me he would have to get back in time for that. So you see, if it's only the tennis you're thinking about, you might just as well let me go along as far as Beulah."

"Oh, he did?" asked her sister, rather sharply, it must be confessed, for one who had been so abstracted a moment before. "He said he'd have to get back?"

"Yes, Lou. Why? What's the matter?"

"Nothing." She thrust a pin into her hat.

Hilda regarded her sister's back a moment in silence—as though a back might somehow reveal, if one but looked hard enough, what new emotion was passing through a heart. But when she spoke it was casually, and without further adherence to the theme.

"My, Lou," she said, "you look grand this morning!"

"Ha! My street suit!"

"I know, but all our city clothes look grand up here in the woods."

"Well, I guess Lynndal wouldn't recognize me in a jumper. Remember, he hasn't seen me since last winter," observed Louise, with an evident seriousness of tone which might almost lead one to suspect she

really meant it *was* necessary to dress up in order to be recognized.

"Yes, but you've written every day," Hilda reminded her, renouncing the subject of clothes and skipping light-heartedly along the way of digression which had thus been opened up.

"It isn't so!" her sister assured her.

"Well, then, three times a week."

"That's a very different matter." Suddenly she thought of Richard, and the fecund diligence, on her side at least, of their correspondence. She scowled. And then she went and bent over the girl in bed. "Can you see any powder on my face?"

Hilda said she thought she could see just a tiny little bit of rouge. So Louise rubbed her face vigorously with a towel, by way of destroying any possible trace of artificiality, and bringing thus a heightened natural bloom.

There really was very little artificiality about the Needham girls. The Rev. Needham was always nervously on the lookout for that. His great horror was such episodes as are dear to the hearts of novelists: episodes in which soul-rending moral issues appear. And he believed, and often quite eloquently gave expression to the belief, that a subtle germ of artificiality lay at the root of all emotional excesses. Louise's unhappy affair with Richard, the Rev. Needham was pleased to lay almost squarely at the door of Eastern Culture. To be perfectly candid, the Rev.

Needham did not know a great deal about this so-called Eastern Culture. But he was persuaded—as are perhaps many more good souls in the Middle West—that it was something covertly if not patently inimical to those standards of sane, quiet living to which he almost passionately subscribed. Why had they ever sent her East at all? "It was that fashionable school that did all the harm," he would say, with a sigh in which there was more than a hint of indignation. Louise herself, whatever she might think of the Culture, admitted that half the girls in the school were deep in love affairs, most of which bore every promise of turning out badly. The school was in that paradise of schools, the nation's capital. It was a finishing school, and a judicious indulgence in social activities was admittedly—even a bit arrogantly—one of the features of the curriculum.

Ah, yes. That was just where all the mischief began. If she had stayed home instead and received young men in her mother's own Middle Western parlour, she might have been spared—they might all have been spared—that terrible ordeal of the heart, with its gloomy envelope of humiliation. In plain terms, Richard had simply turned her down. One might argue about it, but one could not, in the end, really deceive oneself. He had turned her down, thrown her over, jilted her, after flirting desperately and wickedly—though in a manner which the Rev. Needham strongly suspected was

looked upon as innocent and even rather proper by the decadence of that East he was always harping upon.

Louise, artless and unworldly, as she had been trained to be from the cradle, found herself but poorly equipped to combat such allurements as the dreadful Richard exhibited. It was an old tale, but none the less terrible for all that. She believed everything he said to her, fatally misconstrued his abundant enough ardour, fell madly in love, and wanted to throw herself in the river when she realized at length that her beautiful dream was shattered. Naturally, the Rev. Needham was shocked. He was horrified when his daughter wrote of throwing herself in the river. He did not definitely visualize the Potomac, which he had never seen; it was the convulsing generality that gripped him.

Mrs. Needham's conduct, at that time, had proved much more practical, if less eloquent, than her husband's. She went straight to her daughter, determined to bring her back home; and she left a distracted minister to make what progress he could with the Sunday sermon—agonized, as he was, by fevered visions of his child's body, gowned in an indefinite but poetically clinging garment, her hair tangled picturesquely with seaweed, floating upon the surface of a composite stream in the moonlight. Necessarily in the moonlight. The effect was more ghastly that way. And certain immortal lines of verse would ripple moaningly through his thoughts:

"The tide rises, the tide falls,
The twilight deepens, the curfew calls;
. . . . . .
Darkness settles on roofs and walls,
But the sea in the darkness calls and calls. . . ."

The Rev. Needham was not himself a poet, but there was poetry in the family. A brother had written poetry and gone to the devil. The Rev. Needham didn't even read poetry very often any more (for of course he never though of looking upon King James's Version as a poem). In fact, the Rev. Needham had almost a kind of sentiment against poetry, since brother Will had disgraced them all. But it was curious to observe that at times of intense inner tumult, appropriate metrical interlinings had a way of insinuating themselves out of the vast anthology of his youth. Thus, while Mrs. Needham was away looking after their broken-hearted daughter, the clergyman, struggling to evolve his sermon, had to combat such tragic dirges as:

"One more unfortunate,
Weary of breath,
Rashly importunate,
Gone to her death!"

And by the time the poor man got to those inhumanly personal stanzas:

"Who was her father?
Who was her mother?
Had she a sister . . . ?"

he would be pacing the floor and not getting on one bit with his sermon. Mrs. Needham had the good sense to wire back that Louise was all right, and that she was bringing her home. The sermon was somehow completed. But its text was "Vanity, vanity!" and there were allusions in it to Culture which his congregation never truly grasped.

"Good-bye!" whispered Louise. She gave one last flying peep into the mirror.

" 'Bye, Lou," her sister returned, presenting her lips for a kiss. "I hope he'll *come* all right," she added, while Louise crossed the sanded floor as noiselessly as she could. "And—I'm just *dying* to *see* him!"

The other girl nodded back hurriedly from the door, and was off downstairs.

Hilda lay down again. She even closed her eyes. But she did not sleep any more. A horrid little fear clutched at her heart: What if he should not come?

What if Lynndal Barry should turn out to be another Richard, after all?

2

DOWN in the kitchen Louise adjusted the generator of a small oil stove on which most of the household cooking was done. There was an old wood range in the kitchen also, but that was used only for baking. It generally smoked and occasionally went out—sometimes almost miraculously.

Louise turned up the wicks of the stove burners, made sure that the fuel began soaking freely up into them, and finally applied the flame of a match. Then she put on the teakettle and fetched a frying pan from a hook nearby. Not even young ladies flying grandly off to meet their lovers ought to go without breakfast.

Louise, though she might, perhaps, have been pardoned for overlooking so merely sensible a detail as this, was really treating the whole situation most rationally. It was part of her fine, mature calmness —the calmness she so wished Richard might behold. Playing now—and very convincingly, too—the rôle of cook, she measured coffee, got out eggs, cut some bread. Yes, all this was part of her magnificent calmness. It was indeed a pity Richard couldn't be here to see how altered she was—how unlike the im-

pulsive, unschooled, hyper-romantic girl who had submitted to his fickle attractions. Her cheeks would burn, even now, with inextinguishable chagrin, when she reflected how painfully one-sided the wretched affair had been. Ah, it had constantly been he who did the attracting, she who fluttered about like a silly, puzzled moth. She would have gone without her breakfast every day in the week for Richard. But with Lynndal, thank heaven, all was quite different. Now it was obviously and admittedly she who was doing the attracting. Of course she admired Lynndal tremendously, and loved him. Oh, of course she loved him. She even loved him very much, else would she be engaged? No, but the point was that this time her eyes were open. They were wide open, as eyes should be. She wasn't, this time, blinded by a fatal glitter of wit and the subtle persuasion of manners other and more exquisite than any she had hitherto encountered. Lynndal was totally unlike Richard. Lynndal steadfastly adored her. He even worshipped her. He said so, though with homely and restrained rhetoric, in his letters. Yes, she knew that Lynndal was deeply and lastingly in love with her. So this affair couldn't, it was plain to be seen, turn out the way the other had.

She sang, though very judiciously, under her breath, as she sped about preparing the hurried meal. The water boiled in the kettle. She poured it on the coffee grounds, tossed in an eggshell, left

the pot to simmer. Louise was really quite a skilful cook. Even the Rev. Needham had to admit that this much, at any rate, had been gained from the unfortunate Eastern schooling. She set some cups, saucers, and plates on the kitchen table. Then she slipped out the back door of the cottage and along a path to a little rustic pavilion which they called a "tea-house"—though, as a matter of fact, tea never figured in its usefulness. In the "tea-house" Leslie now was waiting. The path leading to it had been blazed through thick forest growth. Dewy shoots and leaf clusters brushed her as she skipped by. The sun was already up, but under the trees, and especially down in the little hollow she had to cross, all was dusky and still night-touched.

Leslie saw her coming and jumped up. He waited for her in the rustic doorway.

"Good morning!" she called to him out of the tiny valley. "We mustn't wake the cottagers," she cautioned, coming to him and dropping for a moment, rather breathless, on one of the rustic benches.

"People ought to get up earlier," observed Leslie in a voice he just noticeably wanted to keep quite as usual. "They don't know what they miss."

"It is lovely, isn't it?" the girl agreed, abruptly turning and looking off to sea.

The view from this perch was quite extensive. It was a nook particularly popular with admirers of sunsets. At this early hour the sun was not high enough to touch the smooth beach below, but it

lighted the sky, in a lustrous, haunting way, and flashed against the wings of skimming gulls.

However, exquisite though the morning undeniably was, it did not seem the proper occasion for any rhapsodising. Indeed, the occasion did not afford even space for decent enjoyment at all. To Louise the morning appeared busy rather than fair. She was still sufficiently young, for all her esteemed calmness, to look upon life, and in this case especially the operations of the natural world, with intensely personal eyes. Nature was rather an adjunct, even a casual one at that, than something infinitely greater than herself. She and her interests must come first. If convenience permitted, the glory of the sunrise might be saluted in passing. It could be said of Miss Needham that she had a bowing acquaintance with the universe.

"I'm getting us a bite of breakfast, Les," she told him. "You don't mind eating in the kitchen?"

"Hardly!" replied her companion, with the reckless air of one who would possibly like to explain that even kitchens would lose any customary odium which might attach to them, were she to grace them with her presence. Of course Leslie didn't voice any such sentimental and flamboyant thought. There was surprisingly little mawkishness about Leslie, despite his dangerous age. He seemed a serious fellow, though not perhaps exceptionally so. It was a seriousness which embraced all the lighter moods. Leslie was the sort of chap who could con-

verse intelligently with older people, yet lure out the best laughs, too, from a juvenile crowd. It was this fortunate poise that guarded him, generally, against pitfalls of the heroic.

"I suppose we might have been able to get some breakfast in Beulah," he said doubtfully.

But he smiled with Louise as she shook her head. Breakfast would be more reliable in the Needham kitchen. And she rose and led the way back down the path.

"You're sure the boat's in good condition for the run?" she asked anxiously over her shoulder.

"Oh, yes."

"It would be awful to break down half way over and miss the train."

"It won't, Louise. You won't miss your train." He spoke a little bitterly.

As a matter of fact, Leslie had been up half the night tinkering with his engine—which accounted for his fine assurance. Louise was painfully aware that the engine couldn't be consistently banked on. It didn't, as a general thing, receive the most scrupulous sort of care. The Leslian poise had its lapses.

They crept with admirable stealthiness into the kitchen, whose habitual odour of spices and damp cereal products was now broken by the livelier aroma of steaming coffee. There was only one chair in the kitchen. When Eliza the cook received her young man, who was the porter of a resort hotel

in Beulah, it was invariably in what the Rev. Needham liked to call God's Great Out-of-Doors—that most capacious and in many respects best furnished of receiving parlours, after all. Invariably—that is, of course, except when it rained. When it rained Eliza and her young man had an entrancing way of conceiving the single chair sufficient.

Louise signified with a wave of the hand that Leslie was to go into the dining room, ever so quietly, and fetch another chair. He did so, and set both chairs beside the kitchen table, at the places marked out already with plates, cups, and imitation silver. Then he sat down, thrust his elbows on the oilcloth, and gazed ruefully between his fists at the young lady who, still in the guise of cook, was fluttering about in the manner of young ladies who do not perhaps feel quite at home in their work, yet who would defy you to point out one single item not accomplished according to the very best methods. He watched her with a mournful intensity, which, had it possessed a little less positive feeling, would surely be called a fixed stare. She turned round presently and discovered his attitude.

"For goodness' sake," she whispered, "what makes you look at me that way?"

He shifted his gaze to the still trees outside and began humming.

"I didn't know I was looking at you any special way. And anyhow, if I was, you know why," he told her, with a slight effect of baffled yet defiant

contradiction which was immediately muffled by a renewed humming.

"Leslie, you know we talked it all over yesterday."

"I know, I know."

"And you said it was all right. You said you understood. There wasn't going to be any kind of misunderstanding. . . ."

"There isn't any misunderstanding. Why do you jump on me? I didn't begin talking about it."

This was manifestly true. However, she handled it deftly. "You don't have to talk when you look that way."

"Sorry!" snapped Leslie, who began moodily tapping with his fingers on the oilcloth. Without realizing it, he was tapping the same tune he had just been humming.

She flushed a little, and felt a brief angriness toward him. Had she given words to what was, for a moment, really in her mind, she would have maintained, and not without honest warmth, that a man you have jilted hasn't any right to feel hurt. But a moment later this conception did not seem quite so honest. No, it didn't honour her. She knew it didn't. And ere she had drawn three breaths she was thinking of Leslie with considerably more tenderness. However, in this connection, as with the momentary impatience, sentiment did not spend itself in words. She merely asked him, in a very kindly way, how he liked his eggs best.

"I don't care," he replied, employing the colourless masculine non-assertiveness usual in such cases.

"Do you like them scrambled."

He nodded drearily.

"Then we'll have them scrambled," she announced with a cheerful smile, breaking several eggs across the edge of a bowl, adding a little milk, as carefully measured off as though it were vanilla for a cake, and proceeding slightly to beat the combination. There seemed something ungraspably and very subtly characteristic in the decision to scramble them. . . .

In no time the two were seated at breakfast.

She grew chatty. "I'm sorry there isn't any toast, Les. We can't make decent toast over an oil fire. We've tried it," she expanded with labelled significance, spreading butter on a rather dry slice of bread.

The bread that was dry today might be soggy tomorrow. It should be noted in passing that up here in the woods the supplies showed a tendency to grow either very soggy or very dry. In fact, the bread and pastry boxes were often the most infallible of barometers.

Leslie perjured himself with an assurance that the bread was delicious.

"In town," she went on, pouring the coffee, "we have an electric toaster. We have it on the table and make toast as we want it. I wish we had it up here!"

"Could you make it work with oil?" asked her companion with sweet maliciousness.

"Of course not," she sighed. "I always forget. I wish they'd run wires out here to the Point. I have an electric curler at home, too. It's such a bother sticking your iron down the chimney of a lamp."

"I should think it would be," agreed Leslie, stirring his coffee and shepherding such of the grounds as floated upon the surface over to the edge of the cup, where they were scooped up and deposited on the saucer.

They conversed for a time on casual and everyday topics, as people, even involved in mighty issues, have rather a way of doing, after all. She kept warning him, with pretty, prohibitive gestures, not to speak above the safe pitch established upon their entry. The warning was more picturesque than really necessary, however, for Leslie, just then, happened to be in a mood far from boisterous.

"Oh, dear! I forgot to dash cold water into the pot before I took it off!" she cried in some dismay, as she observed his slightly exaggerated preoccupation with the floating intruders. "It boiled the last thing. I thought the fire was turned out under it, but it wasn't."

"What difference does it make?" the lad protested with lugubrious gallantry.

And he desisted from his efforts and drank his coffee down, grounds and all, in rather impolite gulps.

Louise, just at this stage, turned her attention to her own cup. There was one lonesome ground drifting aimlessly and forlornly round and round in obedience to the impetus of a current set in motion by the recent stirring. She had poured her own cup last, which explained its being so much clearer than his.

"Oh, look here, Les!" she exclaimed, following the solitary coffee ground in the air with the tip of her spoon. "There's just one. That means a visitor, doesn't it?" She coloured a little, and lifted the oracle up gently.

Leslie shrugged, conspicuously bored, and devoted himself moodily to what remained of his share of the eggs. "I don't know," he said.

But she couldn't be swayed from her zeal. She was determined to be agreeable—especially when it was possible to come upon such agreeable speculations as this. "There's something about finding money on top of your coffee," she embroidered, "though you can always make some come if you hold the pot high enough as you pour. But you see you can't make a *visitor* unless there *is* one."

And Leslie heroically refrained from suggesting that even visitors might be warded off if one didn't forget the dash of cold water. However, he did remind her that there needed no signs to tell her there was a visitor on the way. And he added, with rather juvenile petulance: "I guess he'd come if there weren't any grounds in the *pot!*"

But this riled her. "I don't mean to sit here and listen to you speaking disrespectfully of Mr. Barry! He's much older, and you can't treat him as you would one of the boys."

" I don't want to," her friend returned, vaguely, yet still somehow pointedly.

She smiled, erasing the friction from their talk. "In the case of the coffee grounds, as I understand it, if it seems soft it's a lady, and if it's hard it's a man. Am I all wrong? Is it tea leaves I'm thinking of? At any rate, we'll experiment!" She eyed her companion with coy and almost vicious pleasure. "Perhaps this one's only Aunt Marjie, who's already here."

She carried the problematical atom to her teeth. The test, which she strove to make momentous, was one to which Leslie brought only a melancholy interest. She set her teeth firmly together. There was a little brittle crack. The indisputable fact that it was Lynndal Barry thrust between them a short silence.

3

IT was a subject to which they had come round, almost automatically, at intervals, ever since the letter arrived.

Ah, the letter, the fateful letter! The letter advising her that the man to whom she was virtually engaged would put in an appearance on such and such a day!

Upon its receipt Louise had proceeded with real candour. The letter, or rather the important implication it contained, was discussed at once. Oh, yes. She went at once to Leslie with her sinister yet thrilling confession. Louise Needham was fundamentally an honest, an even straight-forward young person. Fundamentally: though the roots were not, it is true, always called upon. The mistakes she made were rather faults of judgment than altogether of a slumbering conscience. Indeed, there had been numerous occasions when her life would have moved much more smoothly had she been less blunt, or had her personal psychology possessed a few more curves. But this type of downrightness had been sternly inculcated. It was in the blood. The Rev. Needham maintained that a square, simple, stalwart attitude toward the world was the very cornerstone of

security and peaceful living; and he had quotations out of the Scriptures to back it up. Yes, Louise had gone to Leslie at once. True, she hadn't just happened to speak about Lynndal before—that is, she hadn't quite painted the relationship in its true colours, which naturally amounted to the same thing. As for this silence—well, she would argue that it was in no real sense a deception, because the engagement (there was no ring as yet) wasn't public property. No, it was strictly an affair existing between herself and Lynndal. In a way, Leslie ought to consider himself honoured to be consulted at all.

"Well, he'll be here in a few hours now," mourned the honoured individual as they walked along together through the woods toward Crystal Lake and the little launch. "Then goodnight for *me!*"

"Les, please don't talk like that. You'd think we couldn't even be friends any more."

"Friends!" He had been suffered to call her more endearing names throughout the span of the past few weeks.

"I'm sure we'll always be the best sort of friends, Leslie."

But he couldn't see it. "I'm going back to the city!" It was about as close to heroics as he ever verged.

And following this highly dramatic climax there was a little space of silence. They walked on, side by side. Louise began to realize how unwise she had been.

This walk through the forest of Betsey was ordinarily a very wonderful experience. Of course, however, upon this occasion, neither of the young persons concerned was in any mood to appreciate it. For her part, if consulted, Louise would reply that she had no time. Still, for all that, the experience was (potentially) a delight; for here one discovered a true, unspoiled natural loveliness, even a kind of sylvan grandeur. The way, all underneath greenery thickly arched, wound up and down. From every eminence the neighbouring valleys appeared sunk to an almost ghostly declivity; but from the valleys themselves, the uplands, with their rich tangled approaches, soared grandly toward a heaven invisible for leafy vaulting. At this early hour the summits were a little dusky, while the depressions slept in deep shade. The full, fair rays of the uprising sun shot across the exposed tops of the higher levels of forest, and here and there even the loftier stretches of path would be dappled with furtive annunciatory splashes. In the forest it was cool and buoyantly fresh, though heat was already quivering up off the open stretches of sand skirting the smaller lake. It promised to be one of the warm days of a rather grudging season.

"Les," she said finally, "why do you talk about going back to the city?"

"Because I don't care to stay up here and. . . ." If concluded, the sentence would have run: "and see

you together." But he thought better of it. Poise saved him. He compressed his lips.

"Oh, Les, *don't* make it so hard for me!"

"You didn't spare *me!*" he replied grimly.

"What do you mean?" Her eyes were a little wide.

"H'm. . . ."

"Tell me, Les. We can't go on this way." She meant that she would find it uncomfortable—a cloud for her present satisfaction with life.

"You knew how I felt. You knew all about it. Yet you didn't send me packing, or try to drop me. You didn't even give me a hint of how things were. Do you call that sparing a fellow?"

His arraignment was almost bewildering in its complexity. But she chose one indictment and grappled with it valiantly. "Of course I didn't try to drop you. I never treated any man that way!"

"Well," he replied dryly, "I wish you had."

"You wish I hadn't had anything to do with you?" Such a proposition struck her as unpleasant, to a marked degree—even almost grotesque.

He countered without replying: "Didn't you know how much I cared?"

"Yes, but my goodness, Les, must a girl entirely *shun* a man to prevent his falling—I mean, to keep him from caring too much?"

"Oh, no," he answered with a sharp sigh. "Don't mind me. Don't mind anything I've said. I guess

I'll get over it—especially since it seems that you didn't feel at all the way I did, and I was merely making a fool of myself." It was a cup of highly flavoured bitterness.

"Oh, please don't say such a thing as that! You know I told you all along, Leslie, that I—that I had a friend in Arizona, and I—well, you see I somehow felt you'd understand. I didn't know the things we did—I mean I didn't realize our being together so much meant anything except that we—well, that we liked each other and wanted to be together. . . ."

She felt it was just a little lame, and began laying about for more forcible expression. Meanwhile, Leslie muttered: "No, those things never do mean any more, I guess."

"But Leslie, dear—"

She spoke unwisely. At the familiar word of affection, which had thrilled him so often during the unmolested weeks—that wonderful span shattered by the arrival of the letter from Arizona—Leslie momentarily forgot about his dark humiliation. He forgot everything but the fact of the woman beside him. He seized her swinging hand; gripped it. And then they paused, further progress along the sun-flecked way seeming inhibited by some subtle agent in league with the emotion which swept over them both.

Oh, Eros! Are your agents everywhere?

From gripping her hand he unexpectedly and rather bafflingly had her in his arms. And she

presented, for just that charged moment, no resistance, but relaxed there with a little inarticulate, troubled, withal surrendering cry.

"Louise!"

"Oh, Les!"

When they had kissed he broke the curious spell by demanding, with considerable passion, why, if she really did care, she was so willing to throw him over for another man. It seemed a pivotal question. It seemed an unanswerable one, even, in the light of what had just occurred. But Miss Needham, now the spell was broken and she could breathlessly begin getting hold of herself again, proved magnificently equal to it. The beauty of the Needham logic was just that it could always find an answer to every question, however pivotal —some kind of answer, that is.

"Oh, Leslie!" she cried. "Don't you see? I'm *not* throwing you over. Not the way you want to make it seem. I care for you just the same as—yes, as I ever did! Why shouldn't I?" she demanded, with vague defiance. "Only I—I suppose some of the things we've done—what we just did. . . . Well, and the other times, aren't—I suppose they wouldn't be quite right if I'm to be formally engaged. But you see I—I've looked upon this engagement—I mean I've looked upon it as not quite settled yet. . . ." She faltered and spoke more thickly, as though getting down to cold facts somehow made the whole business a little tawdry. "I'm

not wearing any ring yet, you see," she went on, waving her hand before them a trifle awkwardly, and laughing with constraint. "And as long as Mr. Barry and I *aren't* really engaged—not quite in the usual way yet, I mean—I didn't see—I don't see now what harm there is in making—well, new friends."

It was an amazing speech. It was a wonderful speech. He offered no immediate reply to it. What could he say? The fact is, he had never heard just such a speech as this in his life, and found himself, not perhaps unreasonably, a little bit bewildered by it. None of the lessons in feminine psychology he had learned thus far had just prepared Leslie for such a speech as this. As abruptly as they had paused, the two now resumed their walk. And from this moment his attitude toward her was also altered.

Louise started slightly, as though for the first time fully realizing what had just taken place. She glanced at her wrist watch. It was ten minutes to five by the tiny dial.

"I hope we can make it," she said anxiously. The return to her former preoccupations might have struck a disinterested observer as bizarre, though of course Louise wasn't conscious of anything like that. She was not conscious of anything bizarre at all. It was really extraordinary, at times, how free from any blemish of self-consciousness she seemed to be. This was her way: giving herself over en-

tirely to one thing at a time. Curiously enough, it even had something to do with what has (carefully weighing values) been called her fundamental honesty; though here, as so often with her, the true spring was not involved. Concentration was one of the sturdy precepts expounded by the Rev. Alfred Needham. The influence of this father was very strongly marked in the daughter. But as for Leslie, he was keenly conscious, walking beside her through the lovely forest of Betsey, of a shift which seemed to him untimely and again humiliating. He grew reserved and cold; walked along in silence. However, his thoughts were busy. And the more he thought of it, the more convinced he was that that phrase of hers: "I don't see what harm there is in making new friends," sounded a warning which he must heed! Louise glanced again at her watch to make quite sure she had read the hour aright.

"Les," she demanded, wholly consumed now with the apprehension lest she miss her train, "is your watch with mine?"

"I have five minutes to five," he answered coldly, pressing open the case of his old-fashioned heirloom watch and quickly snapping it shut again. He snapped it as quickly as he could because he did not want to let his eyes rest on the picture pasted inside the case.

"Do you think we can make it?"

"I've made it in less time, a good deal."

"Les," she entreated wanderingly as they emerged

from the forest and scudded through the sand to the boathouse where he kept his little launch, "we simply *must* be friends, whatever happens."

She studied, though abstractedly, the settling look of antipathy on his face. She did not know what it meant, but instinctivly she shuddered at it just a little.

"Les, dear, you must let me be. . . ."

His curiosity was aroused, and he broke with a heavy bluntness into the groping silence. "What?"

"Why, I was just going to say you must let me be" —the inevitable could not be restrained—"be like a sister to you. . . ." And she smiled, even through her troubled abstraction. She laid a hand on his arm. "I know that sounds as though it came out of a book, but it expresses my thought as well as I know how. You know—you see I'm a little older than you—though I never think of that. . . ."

Leslie dropped his arm, and her hand slid off. It fell to her side in a limp way. She hardly noticed the fact, though. Her mind was swimming with the strange contending forces which seemed, so inexplicably, to compose her life. She seemed all at once not to see anything very clearly. . . .

They entered the boathouse, but Leslie had not replied to the generous suggestion, and went with a moody briskness about the task of making the small craft ready for the nine-mile voyage. Then he helped her in; arranged a cushion or two. When he touched her there was a mitigated flash of the old

thrill. But the thrill seemed subtly palpitating, now, with something else. It was a new and, oddly enough, a not altogether disagreeable sensation. For the first time, though Leslie didn't as yet clearly realize this, he was looking at Miss Needham critically. He had certainly never looked at her this way before. He noticed a tiny dash of powder she hadn't brushed off the collar of her jacket; observed a very faint and unobtrusive hint of the Roman in her nose. As for her nose, he merely wondered, as he coaxed the engine into activity, that he hadn't marked the true line of the bridge before. . . .

It took nearly an hour to reach Beulah, at the other end of Crystal Lake. Louise, it fortunately developed, would make her train easily. Leslie moored the launch, which had behaved surprisingly well, and escorted his passenger through the tiny village to the railroad station. Little talk sped between them. He asked at what hour the expected steamer was due. Eight o'clock, she told him. He remarked that there would be a good bit of time to consume after she arrived in Frankfort, and she replied, in a mildly distracted way, that she didn't mind. But she added, all the same, with a little petitioning, blind burst: "I wish you were going the rest of the way with me!"

"I will if you want me to," he answered listlessly. Or was he feigning listlessness by way of retrieving his rather severely damaged pride?

"Oh, no!" she cried, merely voicing the instinctive contradiction whch rose most naturally to her lips. The train was heard whistling in the distance. Then she remembered something, and spoke with greater assurance than had been displayed on her part since they left the forest of Betsey. "You're expected back, you know, to play tennis. You promised." She seemed almost relieved, in a way; yet she could not resist, too, the little muffled dig. And there was also something dark lurking beneath both the relief and the dig.

"I promised?"

"Didn't you tell Hilda you'd be back in time for the match?"

"Oh—yes," he admitted.

"So you see," she laughed, "you had no thought of going on any farther than Beulah!"

His just expressed willingness to accompany her the rest of the way had depended directly upon her own sufficiently vehement exclamation: "I wish you were going!" But the way she laughed seemed to imply a kind of duplicity in him which brought a flush to his face. And he reminded her, with glacial tones: "You told me all along I could only take you as far as Beulah. You were very positive about it." The kindling distrust did not die out of his eyes.

"Yes, I understand, Les. It's all right. Hilda will be watching for you."

Suddenly the train came into view around a bend.

Louise unconsciously straightened her hat and tugged at her gloves, as though Lynndal Barry were to be met aboard the cars instead of emerging, ever so much later, from the boat in Frankfort.

"Good-bye, Les," she said warmly.

"Good-bye."

"Thank you so much for bringing me."

He nodded away the obligation. Then the train started, and Leslie turned back toward his launch.

A feeling of great and wholly unexpected tenderness came upon Louise. She leaned far out of the car window to wave. He looked back, saw her, and waved also; then sauntered coolly on toward the dock.

4

WHEN Louise and Leslie walked together through the forest of Betsey they had not as a matter of fact passed entirely unobserved.

Hilda, after her sister had gone downstairs, didn't remain long in bed. Right on the heels of that cloudy fear lest Mr. Barry fail to arrive and Louise's heart be a second time broken, there flashed, for Hilda, a fine little campaign in her own behalf. Hilda's education in the great school of love was already quite well launched. Of course she was as yet graded rather intermediately. But Hilda was an alert and ambitious young student. She told herself it would be very much worth while to observe how an engaged lady behaved in the company of other men. Louise was a pattern for her in so many ways—both papa and mama kept insisting. Why not in this also? She might very possibly have need of the lesson some day. However, the real, specific, if not exactly admitted impulse behind her nimble relinquishment of bed was the plain desire just to see Leslie.

It did not take Hilda long to dress. For one thing, of course, she dressed very simply up here in the

wilderness. Louise dressed simply also, but not so simply as Hilda. However, there was a reason for this—a reason of which Hilda was fully cognisant, and one to which she was perforce reconciled. Age made all the difference in the world. She consoled herself with enormous bows on her jumpers, but also with the promise that there would come a day when she, too, would dress less simply, even in the wilderness.

Hilda was listening at the head of the stairs when her sister went up to the "tea-house" to summon Leslie. While the lower part of the cottage was thus momentarily vacant, the girl stole down, making comical faces of deprecatory concern at each separate creak. Then she sped quickly out of the house and off through the thicket in a direction oblique with the path which Louise and Leslie were later to take. Hilda's little by-way struck over two low hills and spilled itself recklessly into the broader road used by the cottagers of Betsey, at a point about a quarter of a mile along, toward Crystal Lake.

She was an odd, inquisitive child, and had a genuine passion for watching the great world spin. Wherever was the most going on, there you would generally find Hilda, an earnest observer, if age or circumstance unfortunately forbade her active participation. She knew far more about the people who summered at Point Betsey than any one dreamed. Hilda had a hammock strung up in an invisible bower just beyond the spot where the little path lost itself.

There was only a dust-powdered screen of boughs and bushes between it and the road. The hammock, handed down to her when the Rev. Needham invested in a fine new one for the cottage, had seen more than a season of unroofed service, and was consequently rather inclined to be stringy. It was, in point of fact, a very dilapidated hammock indeed. But Hilda esteemed it highly. She thought it a very estimable hammock—had a real affection for it. Hers was happily the age when rags are royal raiment—without the solemn, limiting balance of that sublime and classic exclamation.

She reached this secret nook quite out of breath. Of course there was no real need for all this haste. She knew there wasn't. But youth does not loiter on such errands. She flung herself down in the hammock and for a time lay still. It was cool here, and hazy with dawn. To one side of her the scrub thicket, sprinkled with sturdier growth, lay almost stygian; to the other side was the Betsey road, a bright, tortuous band of morning, threading the Betsey woods as though it were the path of some exploring courier of Sol. Through the flimsy façade of leaves the light of morning streamed into Hilda's bower with a mistily tempered shine. Though ample, this screen afforded plenty of peepholes; and naturally Hilda knew them all. If a storm threshed through the forest and wrenched wisps of woodbine into a different position, or whipped the heavier undergrowth into a new pattern, temporary or per-

manent as the case might be, the girl was quick to perceive the new order of things and to train her eye to the altered scope of vision. She lay now in the hammock, regaining her breath, and swung herself gently back and forth with the aid of a stout wild grape tendon.

There was a great deal of wild life all about her: birds and squirrels and chipmunks and queer little humming, whirring, chirping insects. Some seasons certain of the cottagers brought up household cats with them from town, when it might be observed that the birds and squirrels were much less in evidence—much more wary and reserved in their deportment. But as it chanced, this year there wasn't a cat on the Point, and the woods were full of day-long frolic.

Hilda had some time to wait. The two persons on whom her innocent espionage was designed, loitered, as we have seen, through their breakfast; and the little girl was almost ready to persuade herself that Louise and Leslie must have taken the much longer, circuitous northern route, when suddenly she heard their voices.

They appeared to be talking softly, as though still imbued with dawn-cautiousness, even where there was no longer the possibility of disturbing any one's slumber. Hilda, lying there so still and expectant, saw them walking together along the road. Leslie's eyes pursued the ground he was treading, but Louise was glancing anxiously up at him.

"You would think we couldn't even be friends any more," she was saying.

And then Hilda heard the lad beside her mutter: "Friends!"—in that tone that appeared to embody so much. . . .

"I'm sure we'll always be the best sort of friends, Leslie," Louise said warmly.

And then they were almost beyond hearing. However, Hilda caught Leslie's thick communication about going back to the city, and it troubled her a good deal. She slipped out of the hammock and peeped through the shielding leaves. She thought to herself: "How well they look together!" And she seemed suddenly full of a vague unhappiness. Out of a subsequent observation: "Louise always looks well with men," Hilda did not for some reason or other, glean the poor ounce of consolation, regarding Leslie, that might appear nestling there.

She left her bower and returned to the cottage in a rather soberer mood, along the open road they had so recently traversed.

The summer rising of the parent Needhams regularly occurred about seven. In town, during the season of lengthened nights, the household was suffered to slumber perhaps a half hour longer; but matinal "dawdling," as the Rev. Needham put it,

was a symptom of decadence to be scrupulously shunned. The Rev. Needham had a rather definite persuasion that all the people in the East inclined towards late rising. He had a theory that a day well begun was bound to end well. It didn't, as a matter of fact, so far as he was concerned—at least there was nothing at all dependable about it; but these collapses, these drab failures of the real to coincide with the ideal, these sloughings off from a kind of Platonic scheme of perfection, constituted what stood as perhaps the reverend gentleman's most distinguishing quality. Here was a man marked for a kind of almost rhythmic disaster. The wheel of life never ran smoothly, but kept bumping over sly pebbles of chagrin and disappointment. The Rev. Needham was like a Middle Age (or perhaps early Chinese) delinquent, strung up for chastisement, his arms pinioned to a beam overhead, and the mere points of his toes permitted to touch the ground. An inch or a few inches relaxed, and he would be all right. If he could only get his heels down! But that, alas, was just the trouble with the Rev. Needham: however dignified and calm he might appear externally, there never was, there never could seem to be, an entire and sincere consciousness of solid ground under his feet. Sometimes he would sigh: "Ah, at last!" But anon there would be a devilish tingling in the heels, which would remind him that they were still upreared. The poor

man's destiny seemed eternally a thing suspended. It dangled and flopped, like a rope's end in nervous, persistent gusts.

Anna Needham relinquished sleep at the hour specified by her spouse cheerfully, as a rule, though there were also occasions when raillery and even discreet rib-proddings entered into the program. Mrs. Needham was, of course, well inured to these regularities of routine, just as her very fibre was toughened and moulded to the ministerial caliber generally. Fundamentally, she was a person of slightly less strenuous tendencies than her husband. Anna Needham was the type of woman whose life is very largely shaped, as is her destiny largely determined, by the man with whom she lives. Her nature was naturally somewhat more amenable than his. Still, she had her distinct rebellions, too. She could take a stand of her own in an hour of crisis. The Rev. Needham's was a nature that did not weather storms any too well. Yes, in time of storms Anna was the more seaworthy. For one thing, perhaps, she had fewer ideals. Thus she did not experience quite such blasting shocks over upheavals and cataclysms. But it must be confessed that this apparent stability was touched, perhaps one might say, rather, a little diluted by a few parts moral or intellectual laziness. Comparative criticism of the Needhams, husband and wife, usually fell into two major divisions. There were, in other words, two factions: those who maintained she was less profound than he,

and those who would insist that she had more common sense. But that they were economically well-mated seemed pretty generally accepted. It was a coalition in which appeared the very minimum of waste, since one was always ready (or in her case perhaps merely inclined) to shut off the spigot of the other's temperamental excesses.

On this particular July morning there wasn't a hint of friction over the proposition of getting up. The Rev. Needham began his brisk, determined stretching at the first stroke of seven. Anna lay passive till the last stroke; but as the strident and spiteful clangour of the Dutch clock downstairs resolved back again into a monotonous though hardly less crabbed *tick*-tock, *tick*-tock, the lady yawned deeply and with just a concluding gurgle of relish. There was a guest already in the house, another guest on the way. Hostesses, however soft the bed, aren't likely to surrender to tempting inertia under such circumstances.

As a matter of fact, the bed was not a very soft one. Or rather, it was very soft in places and very hard in others. Perhaps one of the enduring charms of small resort cottage life is the amusing inequality of things. The best and the worst hobnob. Lo, here is a true democracy! And virtues utterly commonplace in your urban ménage may very easily be given a most heavenly lustre in the wilderness.

"Well, Anna," he said, in his best tone of fresh,

early morning cheerfulness, "I guess it's time to get up."

"Alf, you don't mean to tell me that was *seven!*"

She had counted the strokes; but it was customary to have a little conversation about the time of day before arising: a sort of pleasant, innocuous tongue-limbering, a lubrication of the way to more important themes later on. Such gentle, indirect prevarications may perhaps be looked upon indulgently, even when, as in this case, they crop out in clerical families.

The Rev. Needham proceeded to dress and shave.

He was in a good, confident, substantial mood today; rose singing. The Rev. Needham was very apt to arise with song in his mouth, bravely defying the chance of his going to bed with a wail. This morning the selection was that fine old *Laudes Domini* which seemed peculiarly appropriate, both fitting the hour and reflecting the joyous state of the singer's heart.

> "When morning gilds the skies
> My heart awaking cries:
> 'May Jesus Christ be praised!' "

The Rev. Needham had a tenor voice of fair quality, though not altogether true of pitch. In the wilderness, so far from pipe organs, pitch however, dwinled to comparative unimportance. It was the *spirit* of song that counted.

Now, one might observe that in this hymn the Rev. Needham would come out very full and strong on the more purely ecstatic lines (such, for instance, as de-

pict the spread of morning across the heavens, the awaking of a fervent heart, etc.), and that, almost invariably, those more climactic, particularly the more ecclesiastical, lines would issue a little muffled, as the singer found it urgent to immerse his head in the washbowl's morning plunge, or apply a towel vigorously, or perhaps bend suddenly over to lace up his shoes—by this movement naturally cutting down the egress of breath. They were subtly odd, these mufflings. It was almost as though Fate had determined sedulously to deny to this unfortunate man an indulgence in his very life-mission: praising his Maker! For another than he the intervals of competition might very easily have fallen less saliently. Yes, another would have found it possible to cloud over, if necessary, the heavenly gilding and would have been suffered to come out free, triumphant, on the diviner phrases. But not the Rev. Needham. No, alas, not he. It was a part of the Rev. Needham's destiny that the better and more satisfying arrangement of life must be withheld, or temporarily awarded only to be broken rudely off. Inquiry ought to pause here. Yes, it delicately and righteously and above all humanely ought. No, it ought not to lead one away, fiendishly to lure one on to a certain door in one of the three-quarters partitions, beyond which the slumber of a human being was giving place, at this stage, to the more irregular sounds signifying a return to consciousness. Ah, better to leave out altogether the thought of any

mortal responsibility for the muffling; better to cling decently just to the adverseness of an obdurate Fate. And yet, the tenor of the conversation which now ensued between the Rev. Needham and his wife might favour the suspicion—let us call it by no stronger name—that the person beyond that door in the three-quarters partition *had* something to do, however slightly, with the matter of vocal emphasis.

"Anna," he asked softly, "do you suppose your sister's awake yet?"

"I don't know, Alf. Perhaps I'd better go tap on her door."

"Oh, well, I wouldn't disturb her just yet. Eliza is always late with breakfast." He sighed as he beat up the lather in his mug. "We can't expect things to run along quite as smoothly as when we're just by ourselves."

"I told Marjie we made a practice of getting up at seven," said Mrs. Needham a little anxiously. She slipped a coloured silk petticoat over her head and tied its tape strings round her waist. Mrs. Needham was growing a bit stout. "She told me if I didn't hear her moving around I'd better tap on her door."

"It's this air, I suppose, makes people sleep so," he remarked. And then he added, displaying a strong touch of nervousness in his tone: "I think, Anna, your sister is changed, somehow."

"You think so, Alf? How?"

"Well, I don't know. Perhaps it's our not being used to her after so many years."

"You may be right, Alf. But she talked real sensibly to me yesterday. We had quite a long talk in the afternoon, while you and Hilda were out after berries. She seems real sensible, Alf. Of course she does say things—"

"Yes, she makes remarks, Anna, that I could rather prefer our girls not to hear."

"You mean like what she said at dinner about the natives of Tahulamaji?"

"Yes—things like that." And then he confessed with a nervous little gesture: "I can't seem to figure out where Marjory stands any more. She talks with a freedom. . . . Anna, I don't think I ever heard any one talk just the way Marjory does."

"You mean—about religion, Alf?"

"Well," he resumed, "it may be her way. But I can't say I ever knew a woman to talk like that. I think Marjory's very good-hearted. She no doubt means the best in the world. But somehow. . . ." He turned toward his mate, poising the razor in the air. He looked, without of course suspecting it, almost terrible. But he went on with merely the same inflection of nervous timidity: "Anna, there are times when I suspect she doesn't believe the way we do any more."

"Oh, Alf—do you mean—is it as though she'd gone into some other church?"

"Well, I don't know." He resumed his shaving in a troubled, fidgety way.

"Alf," she said solemnly, standing in the centre of the room with her hands on her hips, where they paused in the act of adjusting the band of her skirt, "Alf, you—you don't think she isn't a *Christian* any more?"

The Rev. Needham nervously cut himself a little. He laid down the razor with a startled sigh.

"Anna," said he, "how do *I* know? If it *is* true, then it's one of the things I've always dreaded so—having atheism break out right in the family!"

"Oh, Marjory *can't* be one of those people!" her sister cried earnestly. "Alf, we ought not to judge her so harshly. She's lived in foreign countries so long that I suppose she's kind of gotten into new ways of speaking. She talked so sensibly yesterday, Alf—I kept wishing you could have been there to have heard."

"Well, Anna," he said quietly, "Marjory's your sister, and, whatever the facts, naturally I've nothing to say."

"You try and have a good talk with her, Alf. I never felt you two understood each other very well. She don't talk so flippantly when there aren't other people around. I'll fix it so you two can be alone together. Oh, Alf," she concluded, almost piteously, "Marjie may have gone into another church, but I *can't* believe she's drifted any farther!"

"I hope not, Anna." He tried to speak with an

air of charitable calm; but the impression conveyed seemed rather that a disturbance of his own convictions was troubling his heart than that he was primarily moved with concern over his sister-in-law's spiritual well-being.

All persons with whom he came in contact influenced the Rev. Needham. They influenced him one way or another, however transiently. In fact, when it came to that, there was seldom what one would call any really permanent influence exerted. Contacts with life merely kept him hopping back and forth or up and down. They augmented, were perhaps more largely than anything else responsible for, the poor man's perpetual inner unrest. He could not seem to settle down to cool, steady views; could not feel his soul impregnably at peace. But then, in this regard he seemed, though perhaps in a rather acutely pointed fashion, logical fruit of his time.

To be, for the moment, quite ruthless in one's musing upon him, what would the world say if it could really pry into the tumultuous inner consciousness of the Rev. Needham? Might the world call him melodramatic, stagy? Could it actually be brought against this minister that he was, in a sense, theatrical? What a blow—and at the same time what a terrific coup of irony; for the Rev. Needham would be the very first himself to cry out against any such trait as staginess! Staginess, he would say, must certainly have something to do with the so-called

"culture." But the world could never bring this charge against the Rev. Needham, because the world, one realizes with an instinctively grateful sigh, was denied the license of prying inside. No, to the world this minister appeared a being not essentially removed from the usual run of beings. The world by no means thought of him as a Chinese or Dark Age delinquent strung up for punishment in such a manner that his heels were perpetually off the floor. He might not, perhaps, strike people as a man of intense and dynamic, of unfailingly clean-cut personal persuasions about religion—or, for that matter, perhaps, about anything else in life. Nevertheless, he scarcely stood out as vivid or eccentric; scarcely like a sore thumb; because nobody realized what he was really like inside.

But now, to return to cases, here was Marjory, his wife's own sister, lodged right under his roof; and she baffled him. He couldn't deny it—could not get away from it. Yes, she *baffled* him. He felt nervous in her presence. Sometimes when she would laugh, or look at him in a certain way, it seemed to him—it seemed to him—why, as though he didn't know where he stood any more. . . .

Marjory Whitcom was his sister-in-law, one of the family; and at his own hearthside, somehow, he could not feel quite free. He could not feel cheery and at ease. And dimly it troubled the Rev. Needham to realize that he felt this way.

5

THAT Miss Whitcom was indeed up and stirring became evident. They heard her gaily calling out to Hilda, who was coming up the stairs.

"Dear child, see here a minute!"

Two doors opened then: hers, briskly wide; the Rev. Needham's a furtive crack.

"Yes, Aunt Marjie?"

"Honey, there isn't any water in my pitcher—would you mind. . . . ?"

"Oh, I'll fill it right away for you, Aunt Marjie!"

"Only half full, honey. I'd slip out myself to the pump, only I'm afraid of shocking Eliza with my wrapper!"

"I won't be gone a minute, Aunt Marjie!"

She took the pitcher, extended by means of a plump bare arm, and sped off with it.

"Alf," said Mrs. Needham, "I forgot to tell Eliza the pitcher would have to be filled every day."

"I suspect Marjory is a bit wasteful of water," he observed.

Here at the Point there was water, water everywhere; yet the Needhams employed far less of the fluid in their daily toilets than they did in the town.

This is perhaps not infrequently the case at summer resorts of the more primitive kind, where one attains the frugal attitude generally. Then, too, having to go out to a pump for water alters its preciousness. Besides, as all the Needhams would argue: "We go in bathing so often." So the pitchers weren't refilled *every* day. They were generally refilled about two or three times a week. Miss Whitcom's pitcher, however, would have to be put in a class by itself. That was only too clear.

The Rev. Needham tied his cravat before the dresser glass. A few tiny drops of perspiration stood out on his forehead. "Yes," he sighed, "it does upset things some."

"What say, Alf?" asked Anna, who was bending over an ancient trunk in which clean linen was kept.

"I say, Eliza will just have to get used to filling her pitcher every morning."

"I guess so," agreed Mrs. Needham, straightening, her face flushed.

She held a fresh towel in her hand, which he eyed with glancing suspicion.

"I got to thinking," explained his wife. "Perhaps she's used to having a clean towel every morning, too."

The minister compressed his lips almost imperceptibly as she went to her sister's door, the towel over her arm. Hilda, with the pitcher of water, arrived at the same moment, so that mother and daughter stood with their respective burdens on Aunt

Marjie's threshold, and even spoke together, like rival hucksters proclaiming their wares.

"Gracious!" cried the favoured lady, opening her door and accepting the alms. "Such magnificent service! Anna," she added, "don't you let me put you out. I can easily live on the view. You really don't know what this means, after being cooped up in a place like Tahulamaji!"

Miss Whitcom was tall, and rather fine looking. She was a trifle taller, for instance, than her brother-in-law, and had a way, when any discussion with him was in progress, of standing up quite close to the minister, so that she created the illusion, a little, of towering over him. She was not, of course, actually a great deal taller, but how one could make the sly inch count at such times! Her sister looked almost dumpy beside her.

"I suppose," observed Mrs. Needham, "you do feel kind of cooped up in those foreign places. That phrase of hers "foreign places," was in the nature of a stock term. It was expansive, elastic, comprehensive. She spoke of foreign places a little as her husband spoke of the East or of "culture." Neither had travelled any to speak of. In a sort of whimsical way it seemed to Mrs. Needham that one might expect to find Bombay and Peking supporting much the same conditions of life. Or even Dublin and Rome, for that matter. "I don't suppose," she added, "there's anything like this where you've been."

"I should emphatically say *not*," her sister assured her. "At Rato-muh—that's the capital, you know—we've nothing but a dirty little river. I'm dying for a glorious swim!"

"We go bathing nearly every afternoon, Aunt Marjie," Hilda announced.

"You do? Well, I'm with you!" She was just a trifle loud. "Do there happen to be any convenient islands one could swim out to?"

"Oh, no, Aunt Marjie, there aren't," replied the girl regretfully, almost with a touch of naïve apology.

"Well, no matter. You can always swim round in a circle, of course. Only I do like having a definite goal."

And then she paused a moment, even suspending her toilet; for having a goal—hadn't that been, with almost amusing steadfastness, her aim all through life? Of course, it was quite true: there had been perhaps a hundred goals, all told; but each, in its own way, and at its own time, had seemed the golden, final one. And always so incorrigibly *definite*. She had gone vibrantly and humorously on from one pursuit to another, determination taking multiple form. And yet there appeared now to have been, all along, just one permanent and unswerving determination: not to marry O'Donnell.

Miss Whitcom sighed briefly and went on hooking herself up.

"Speaking of swimming," she continued. "I

won a gold medal once. Yep. A very long time ago."

"A medal for swimming, Aunt Marjie?"

The aunt nodded. "I entered a five-mile endurance and time. Entered against thirteen men, and got there first!"

"Oh, how *wonderful!*" cried Hilda admiringly.

"Yes, it was wonderful," the other admitted; then frowned. "The only trouble was that I had my subsequent doubts of its being really fair."

Mrs. Needham, who had been standing in the doorway, a faint and musing smile on her lips, received the news of the swimming match with a hurried comment about having to go down and see how Eliza was getting on with breakfast. She was always, and especially with Alfred in mind, mildly shocked at the glib way in which her sister talked about men.

"How do you mean it wasn't fair, Aunt Marjie?" demanded little Hilda, sitting down eagerly on the edge of the bed.

"Came to suspect one of them."

"One of the men?"

"Um-hm."

"Of *cheating*, Aunt Marjie?"

"Um. Turning lazy at the finish."

"You mean he let you win?"

"Afraid so, Hilda."

"But I've heard papa say that women ought to be treated. . . ."

"That men ought to go lazy at the finish and let you pull in ahead?"

"Of course papa never put it *that* way. I don't believe he knows about women going into regular contests like that, with men."

"I daresay not, Hilda. Such things wouldn't conspicuously have entered into Alfred's training."

"What did you do when you found out about it, Aunt Marjie?"

"What do you mean—when I'd convinced myself he hadn't played fair?"

"Yes."

"Sent him the medal." She shrugged.

"You *did!*"

"Um. It belonged to him, not me. Yes, sir—it went right straight off to him, with a polite note. The note was terribly polite. I told him I hoped he'd get just lots of comfort out of it. Real, solid comfort." And she snorted with wrath.

"*Then* what did he say, Aunt Marjie?"

"Then he said—say, look here, Hilda, what *is* your capacity for asking questions?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, Aunt Marjie! I didn't realize how many I was asking."

And she really was sorry. Nevertheless, her eyes continued to shine very brightly. Aunt Marjie had a stimulating effect on Hilda—Hilda being just at the age of hero-worship. This age, in the life of the individual, is somewhat akin to the prehistoric age in human history; it bristles with ever such

fabulous things. And the only natural thing to do when one encounters fabulous things is to ask as many questions about them as one can think of.

But Marjory Whitcom hadn't, as a matter of fact, spoken with any dominant impatience. She had asked Hilda's capacity for questions in a spirit of ridicule which, in a conscious sense of boomerang satire, amply included her own loquacious self. And yet, for all that, there was a slight flush on her face. What brought the flush there? Ah, there are deep things in the human heart. The flush lasted quite a long time. Indeed, it had hardly faded out altogether when she was seated with the family at breakfast.

The Rev. Needham asked the blessing in a faintly grim manner. He spoke it off with a defiant assurance. His sister-in-law, he had just been deciding, *wasn't* to intimidate him at his own table. He kept his eyes tight shut and spoke on almost doggedly. There were a number of graces in the minister's repertory. He was in the habit of using now one, now another. This morning, though the choice was, of course, as always, entirely spontaneous and unconscious, he chose the shortest of them all.

Breakfast was simple and bountiful. The Needhams were rather hearty eaters. There was no stomach trouble in the family, although very strong emotions had, naturally, the same effect on them as on most people. Following Louise's affair with Rich-

ard, as they remembered it, the unhappy girl had eaten almost nothing for months—or it certainly was weeks—and had grown extremely thin. In fact, during the first week following the sad climax *none* of the Needhams had eaten quite normally, except little Hilda. She, only a child of twelve then, came up regularly enough for second helpings, despite her sister's trouble and the general depression of the household. Childhood is, when not perverted, a blessed span, the heart seeming to stand entirely out of touch with any of the homelier and more prosaic organs.

This morning there were wild raspberries—early ones, and not very large—which the Rev. Needham and his younger daughter had themselves gathered in the woods and along the sunny roadways the afternoon previous, while Marjory was conversing sensibly with her sister. After the fruit came a cooked cereal, which Mrs. Needham was annoyed to find a trifle lumpy. And then after that there followed pancakes—pancakes, pancakes—*hundreds*, it seemed, coming in three at a time, which was the griddle's limit.

Just subsequent to the blessing, Aunt Marjie occasioned a very slight flurry in the domestic arrangements by asking Anna if she might have a glass of hot water.

"I'm supposed to drink it now," she explained, "before each meal. It's living so long in the tropics, I suppose."

Mrs. Needham tinkled the bell for Eliza, and glanced, half unconsciously, at her husband. The Rev. Needham, it is to be feared, was growing rather opinionated about his wife's sister. There is, when one stops to view the matter wholly without passion, nothing really criminal in the request for a glass of hot water, just as there is nothing essentially felonious about using all the water you want up in your room. Of course, in such places as deserts it may often be essential to employ circumspection; but scarcely on Point Betsey, where there lay the vast resources of Lake Michigan behind even an extravagant indulgence. And as for having the water hot, well, what are kettles for? One poises the issue. Still, of course, such implications as these are hardly fair to the Rev. Needham, who was animated by no real spirit of parsimoniousness at all, but who merely disliked seeing vaguely devastated the quiet, orderly routine of the house. To tell the truth, while he didn't honestly grudge her the water, the clergyman looked upon his sister-in-law as something of an intruder. However legitimate it might be—and of course nobody could possibly deny that Marjory had a perfect right to be here in their midst—intrusion still was intrusion. The trouble was, he distrusted—all but feared her. And when men fear others, they will often be found taking exception to minor failings, real or fancied, which a sometimes surprisingly acute vigilance discovers in those who inspire their fear. The Rev. Needham, however,

said nothing: merely pressed his lips together, as he had previously done before the mirror upstairs when informed that his relative would have to have her pitcher refilled every morning. It was these repressions which permitted the world at large no too salient suspicion of what was really going on inside.

A pleasant, wholly unremarkable conversation was kept up. It wasn't the sort of talk to invite preservation, but was, on the contrary, just a normal and uneventful flow. True, there seemed an unwonted excitement in the air. The day upon which Mr. Barry was to arrive must necessarily be considered a red-letter day, and might even be expected, in a sense, to deliver up talk of some special brilliance. But to tell the truth, the great event had already been discussed in all its possible phases and from all conceivable angles, there remaining at length absolutely nothing but for Mr. Barry to put in an appearance.

Throughout breakfast the Rev. Needham maintained as consistent an attitude of dignified prosperity, beneficence, common sense, and scrupulouly informal godliness as possible. Above all, he tried in his demeanour to emphasize an unobtrusive yet firm head-of-the-house bearing—and indeed succeeded, for the most part, so well as almost to persuade himself that he *was* master of his destiny, after all; that his life was growing more solid, more dependable now.

Hilda, of course, chattered a great deal, after her

wont, acquainting her hearers, for one thing, with as full an account of Louise's early departure as seemed politic. She blushed, mentioning Leslie. Miss Whitcom noted that: noted it and sighed. It was obvious the blush was no accident. Another young thing, just starting out; the rough and not always so romantic world ahead of her—and boy-crazy! Marjory Whitcom sighed again. So futile, she told herself. But another valuation just slipped in: so sweet!

Toward the end of the meal, the pancake process, hitherto quite smooth and regular, hitched very badly. No fresh cakes came in, and the supply on the table dwindled alarmingly. The Rev. Needham affected not to notice this. The management of the household, thank heaven! was not on his shoulders. His burdens were the weightier and more important *family* matters—aside, that is, from the business of tending to his own rather unmanageable soul and looking after his flock. There was a great difference between household matters and family matters; pancakes were not in his department; so that, not being himself responsible for the present embarrassment, he could afford to keep up a very good and cheerful front indeed, even when his eyes assured him the kitchen door hadn't opened for fully five minutes.

Mrs. Needham flushed. She always grew more or less excited when there was a break like this in the table service. As concerned her own plate, she, of course, stopped eating, directly it began to look as

though the supply of cakes on the table could not possibly survive till there was a reinforcement from the griddle. She nibbled heroically at the cake already unavoidably on her plate, and suddenly began talking with great animation.

Anna had always felt, obscurely yet unhappily, that her sister did not consider her a really expert housekeeper. In the old days, before weddings and deaths had disintegrated the family, it had always been Marjory who could do things best and most handily. She had seemed a very prize of domestic efficiency. Every one said Marjory would be married off first. There were even unkind asides to the effect that Anna would probably linger on and perhaps eventually run into perpetual maidenhood. Ah, the queer pranks of life! Anna had been carried off first, after all; and Marjory, the acknowledged flower, had gone all these years unplucked.

Anna Needham was always anxious to make a good household impression on her sister. Of course, many sorts of allowances would be made up here at the Point. Still, there seemed no valid reason why the cakes should cease coming in. At last she tinkled her bell. She tinkled it resolutely. Her husband had just helped Miss Whitcom to the last cake. Hilda still had unmistakably a hungry look.

Eliza opened the kitchen door and thrust in her head.

"Did you ring, ma'am?"

"Yes, Eliza, I did. We would like some more cakes."

"Yes, ma'am."

Eliza withdrew her head and closed the door. But while it yet remained within their view, the face of Eliza had something dark and ominous in it.

They heard her making desperate sounds about the stove. One minute, two. Mrs. Needham grew more and more excited. She talked loudly and steadily. The Rev. Needham sat with his hands on the arms of his chair, like a statue of patience. Presently, however, he began to drum with his fingers. Miss Whitcom, realizing the dilemma adjusted herself to it—made the last cake go a wonderfully long way.

Finally Mrs. Needham pushed back her chair, excused herself hurriedly, and went out into the kitchen, the retreat being valiantly covered by her sister, who began telling her brother-in-law fresh tribal characteristics of the people of Tahulamaji.

Out in the smudge of the kitchen Anna Needham faced her cook.

"What is the *matter*, Eliza?"

Eliza was hot and hopeless. She pointed to the griddle upon which were three cakes, still quite pasty, and which had obviously ceased baking.

"What is the matter with the stove, Eliza?"

"It must be the oil is all gone, ma'am."

"But I thought there was plenty to last until the morning delivery from the store."

"Well, ma'am, when I came down I found two burners going, and there was the remains of breakfast on the table. Did Louise go away somewhere early?"

Eliza called the Needham girls quite simply by their first names. She might have honoured them by saying Miss Louise and Miss Hilda. But she hadn't begun that way. She hadn't done that at her last place, nor at any of the other places which constituted her Middle Western retrospect as a domestic; and Anna, in such comparatively unimportant matters as this, found it less frictional to let instruction slide.

Louise had flown, leaving the burners on; there would be no more pancakes for the remaining Needhams and their guest.

The Rev. Needham sighed, and somehow felt that the day was not beginning so very well. However, Marjory began laughing in a singularly hearty way.

"It reminds me," she grinned, "of something in an old melodrama I saw years and years ago at an impossible little theatre. The 'comic relief' was a tramp, whose weakness was the flask. He pretended, as I recall it, to have palpitations of the heart, or something like that, and at one stage of the proceedings went into a series of alarming spasms, each of which would be instantly allayed by a swig from a flask belonging to one of the other characters. The

other character dared not refuse the flask, for fear of fatal consequences, but eyed its diminishing contents with profound regret. How well do I remember! At length the tramp, in one of his worst spasms, was informed that the whiskey was all gone; whereupon he very decently revived, looked out at the audience soberly, and said, in his most mirth-provoking tones: 'Thank heavens there was just enough!' "

The Rev. Needham, as they left the table, looked at her in a half startled way. These stories of hers were never in actually questionable taste, yet they somehow contrived to upset him. There seemed to be always something just behind them which might, as it were, spring out. It was such he seemed to fear most of all: the things in life that might spring out.

"Hilda," said Aunt Marjie, still chuckling over the whole affair, "did you tell me Louise had a young man in the kitchen with her?"

"Yes, it was Leslie. But Aunt Marjie. . . . !"

"Ah, then that explains it!"

"Oh, but Aunt Marjie, Leslie isn't the one. You see, Louise is *engaged!*"

"She is?" demanded the lady more seriously, yet mockingly, too, as though the communication represented fresh news. "Well, then"—for Miss Whitcom refused to be daunted—"the empty burners are no doubt all the better accounted for, Hilda." She laughed again. Then she put her hands on Hilda's young shoulders. "Hilda," she said with

great solemnity, "are you quite *sure* Leslie isn't the one?"

Hilda blushed, and did not look squarely at her aunt, but instead a little bit beyond her.

"Oh, *yes!*" she cried softly.

6

THE first sunlit hours of the day fully realized the brave promise of the dawn. The air was fresh and delicious, though inclined to sultriness as one travelled inland away from the coast. The song of the locust was shrill in the trees.

Louise's way took her a good distance from sea and then brought her back to it again, circumlocutionary travel being one of the features of Point Betsey existence. It might fantastically resolve itself into a paradox: to go an inch you must go a mile. Her destination was the town of Frankfort, situated about four miles south of the great stone light-house and the cottages on the Point. The distance could easily be covered on foot, the pedestrian taking his way along the smooth curving beach of the "Big Lake." But Louise was rather a poor walker. She preferred to lie in a hammock, or, if ground *must* be covered, to depend as largely as possible upon artificial locomotion. Those who declined to walk and had no motor, must, to reach Frankfort, enlist the respective conveyance of boat and train—an almost complicated journey. There was a regular passenger ferry running on Crystal Lake, back and forth between the resorts on the west shore and the village

of Beulah. This ferry boat, propelled by gasoline, was called the *Pathfinder*—a name always preparing passengers new to the route for unimagined nautical adventure. Passengers seemed cheerfully and nonchalantly asked quite to take their lives in their hands, or rather, which might be even worse, to sign them over entirely into the precarious keeping of the boat's owner-pilot-engineer-and-fare-collector. And yet, after all, there was nothing so very terrifying about a trip from one end of Crystal Lake to the other. On the *Pathfinder* Louise would doubtless have travelled this morning but for the fact that the official ferry service was never to be depended upon at so early an hour. Absence of competition had led to a really deplorable state of independence, so that Leslie's little boat was indeed a blessing at such times, in spite of its general decrepitude. He escorted her, as we have seen, the first nine miles of her journey, due east, away from Lake Michigan. Then the train carried her nine miles back again, though somewhere in the proceeding the four miles separating Frankfort and Point Betsey were annihilated. The journey consumed something like an hour and a half.

Louise stepped out of the dilapidated coach. The station stood within a few rods of the seashore—a situation once accommodating the convenience of an enormous summer hotel, which a few years previous had taken fire and vanished in smoke. With it had vanished also the fondest hopes of the

town. However, the ornate railroad terminus still stood just where it had stood during the days of glory. Thank God it was spared, for it had about it a relative magnificence which the impoverished hamlet could ill afford to lose. It might, of course, be more centrally located; still, there was a kind of grace in its sad vigil.

Miss Needham, with considerable time to waste, surveyed the age-softened ruins of the vast hotel and quite cheerfully revived, for her amusement, memories of the time when she was Hilda's age and used to come here to dancing parties and occasional dinners with her family. She paced up and down upon what had once been the walk leading grandly to the hotel from the wharves and the railroad station. Now the way was rank with grass and weeds.

Ah, yes. She had promenaded here in that long-ago time, nor had she walked alone, as she was walking now. Oh, no. And a slight flush, even after all these years, crept into her face as she remembered Harold Gates. Yes, he had walked beside her here, and they had talked together of many things, and laughed a great deal. How she had laughed in the old days! How gay they were! And over there on the channel pier, close to the bowling alley, she had let Harold kiss her, also. Before the summer was over she had let him kiss her rather a good many times. Of course they did not really *love* each other. They were only just awfully good friends. Harold was residing in the hotel with his parents. Louise

only saw him when the Rev. Needham decided they would go in to town and dine. Harold kept promising that he would come out to the Point some day and see her, but he never came. Oh, yes—how memories swarm back, once the tide of their return has set in! Yes, once he did come; but it was only as a member of a picnic party from the hotel. They brought baskets with them and had a fine revel on the beach, quite near the Needham cottage. In the evening they built a fire. But Louise saw her hero only for a moment on that occasion, after all. They walked down the dark beach a little way, and he put his arm around her, and she let him kiss her; but when he said he had to go back to the fire again, there was naturally nothing to do but let him go. The trouble was, he seemed to have a special girl in the picnic party on whom his attentions must be lavished. So young, yet already such a dashing man of the world! But for Louise it wasn't very satisfying.

"What a fool I was!" she cried to herself, almost angrily, even at this comfortable distance. And then she laughed: "What a *silly* little fool!"

Harold Gates was all nicely married and settled down now; a Chicago girl, and they had a baby. Harold had mailed her a postcard with the baby's picture on it, and across the bottom of the picture he had written, in his firm business hand: "Merry Christmas from the three Gates." Was it not strongly to be doubted whether Harold at length even remembered how lover-like they had been that sum-

mer, he and she? Well, it was rather to be hoped he didn't remember; and yet, with a queer little pang for just a moment, Louise thought she couldn't endure his having *entirely* forgotten. . . .

Well, she had certainly been free enough with her affections in those days! Yes, she had been very free. As Louise quitted the ruins (which had an odd, symbolic aspect this morning) and wandered off along the beach, snatches of the prodigality of her past flared up, distressing her, thrilling her a little, filling her heart with gloomy though not exactly acute aversion. Ah, she thought, the kisses that had been spent in vain! And yet they had not seemed entirely in vain at the time—not all of them, at any rate.

From a glancing inventory of those more trifling indulgences of her early days, she soared to the vastly more vital affair with Richard. That, indeed, was different. Yes, that was another matter altogether. Richard was her first real lover. The others were mere boy-sweet-hearts, or they were, like Harold Gates, just awfully good friends. Richard had always seemed mature to her: a *man*. She had always felt herself a woman in his presence. Their affair, wretchedly as it had turned out, was undeniably animated by the love that flashes between men and women. It had a new tenseness, a new dizziness, a new depth. It was magnificent and gripping; had the true ring of authority and surrender in it. Yes, it was a thing of intense intoxication, and maintained,

so far, at least, as she was concerned, an unfaltering white heat.

"And yet—for him," she told herself as she walked close beside the little waves, "it wasn't like that. No, it couldn't have been, even—even during those wonderful times, when we. . . ." And she flushed, as though not even solitude were an utterly dependable guardian of her crimson thoughts. She lowered her eyes, lest impartial nature suddenly be caught up into an impersonation which should cry shame against her.

Oh, yes. She had given her whole heart to Richard. Almost, almost. . . . She shuddered. "What a terrible thing it is!" she told herself. "What a terrible thing, being deceived in a man! But how is one to know? How can one always tell?"

Ah, how indeed? She went on a little way, thinking darkly and arriving nowhere.

"And yet," she wavered, a look of intenser and clearer pain drifting into her eyes, "he was—so dear! Ah. . . ."

If Richard were suddenly to come toward her out of the past; if he were to come toward her here, along this brown beach; if he should hold out his arms to her and bid her to come back. . . . No, no! She clasped her hands, for it was all so real. "No, no," she whispered. "I would not go back. I would not *dare* go back." She had seen him coming toward her many times in fancy, stretching out his arms to her, speaking to

her after his wont. And she had learned to play out her prohibiting side of the terrible ordeal so faithfully, so often, that at length the only emotion she felt was that sense of dullness that goes with things which are irrevocable.

"No, Richard," she would say. "I gave myself to you once. You might have had me then. But not now. It is too late."

She would dismiss him, calmly and sorrowfully; would permit her tongue to utter no words other than these. And yet. . . . She walked slowly along, pondering her life.

What changes had come with the years! What changes! Now her heart was given to another man. This was another sort of love, another sort altogether. Lynndal and Richard were so unlike! Louise wondered whether the love of any two men could be so strikingly unlike as she saw the love of Richard and of Lynndal to be. Indeed, it rather pleased her, as she set them off, one against the other, that the distinction should be so great. It seemed to argue an indeterminate yet quite thrilling variety in herself —not of course, a mere vulgar facility in shifting or adapting herself to types as chance flitted them across her horizon—ah, no!—but a real sense of *understanding*, a genius for grasping the salient elements in many men, a cleverness in appraising their worth. She bolstered her troubled and ghost-ridden heart.

Lynndal was the opposite of Richard, in every way

—in every way, that is, except that he, too, loved her. No, she would say in *every* way, for she knew now that Richard had never really cared, while Lynndal, that was certain, cared very deeply and enduringly.

Her heart quickened now as she thought of her lover. She began reviving, in a happy, drifting way, the slender accumulation of noteworthy items in their romance, hers and Lynndal's: thought of their first meeting, in the lobby of the hotel in Arizona, when she was with her father on one of his infrequent "business" trips. The Rev. Needham owned a little property in the great dry-farming district of Arizona. "This is my good friend Mr. Barry," her father had said. And she had said she was pleased to make his acquaintance, and she had given him her gloved hand. She had thought little about him at the time. And that, perhaps more tellingly than anything else, argued the palpable differences. For Richard she had loved at first sight. He had captured her, madly and hopelessly, alas, quite at the outset. Not so Lynndal. Oh, no.

Louise was much given to musing and contemplation of this sort, which often took, as now, an odd conversational expression.

"I didn't love Lynndal at all, in the first place," she told herself, as though this were the first really definite understanding of the case. "I didn't begin to care until the week was half over. But I saw *he*

cared. I knew that I attracted *him* from the beginning."

And then she left the beach and strolled up into the village.

Three couples passed by, arm in arm, youth and maiden, going for a promenade on the pier. They deported themselves in just the customary Middle Western summer resort manner. The couple ahead would confer in whispers. Then a simultaneous laugh would disturb the lazy stillness of the street. And then it might be that the girl would turn as she walked and whisper something in the ear of the girl behind her, who would laugh out also, at whatever it was the young man ahead had originally confided to his partner. And the companion of this second young lady would look bored and very much left out, while perhaps the young man behind him might mockingly exclaim that secrets in company weren't polite. Then the next minute all six would be singing the chorus of some contemporary rag. And when that was done there would be another chorus. Or else the young lady ahead would shout back to the young lady in the rear and demand of her in tones of such vehemence that they could be shared by all the town, whether she'd heard from John yet—or Harry or Jim or Robert, as the case might be. Whereupon the young man in the middle, who had been mocked by the young man in the rear, would very likely turn and grin, feeling, if rather obscurely,

that the frivolous odds of the hour were now more evenly distributed.

Louise glanced at these careless, gay young persons as they passed, and a feeling of comfortable security crept into her heart.

"Well, I'm glad I'm past all *that!*" she thought with a sigh. "They all act this way at one time or another, and it's certainly a blessing when it's over!"

She turned and looked after the noisy spooners as they bent their steps toward the pier. Suddenly, it seemed for no reason at all, she thought of Leslie. He seemed, quite vividly, to be right here beside her for a moment. It was ever so curious. She wondered why she should think of him so vividly just at this moment. Presently it occurred to her the reason was simply that Leslie, though so young, wasn't boisterous and silly, like the hoodlums she had just passed. No, she could not fancy his ever having behaved like that in his life. Nor could she conceive of his having yet to go through any such gauche, vapid period. With her he had always been very serious. Of course, she was a little older. But Leslie's whole nature was serious, she argued, and somehow—somehow *deep*. She was in the mood now, perversely, to do him the most elaborate justice. Yes, she thought he might be called, in a way, really deep. Certainly she had never known any one like him. She did not, just then, consider that she had never known any one just like Richard, either, when it came to that—or even any one like Harold

Gates. All she could seem to think of, for the moment, was that Leslie had come to fill a unique place in her life.

A feeling of tenderness crept upon her. Yes, they had grown intimate during the short span of their acquaintance. She had been rather lavish. It was Leslie's first summer on the Point. Vaguely she wished it might all have been otherwise, that he might have come into her life sooner, or that. . . . Ah, what was it she wanted?

His voice seemed suddenly ringing in her ears, as it had rung when he cried: "Friends!"

And she sighed.

Oh, Eros, wicked god! She is waiting for one lover, and you torment her with others! You revive for her sweet, irrevocable loves of the past, when one would think the present love enough. . . .

7

LOUISE looked at her watch. It was half past seven. The day was clear and beautiful. Out against the marine horizon stood a ship. That must be Lynndal's. It would be in at eight. She decided she would stroll down the length of the main street and then return to the wharf.

Although the hour was still so early, the little town displayed about as much life as it ever did. There were women with baskets on their arms, examining produce displayed in the few shops where supplies were procurable. There were carefree resorters already about, enjoying a freshness which must soon evaporate under the scourge of the mounting sun. The main street boasted a good many quaint little curio shops, which somehow managed to do a living business. A typical drowsy Northern Michigan small town—not much of a town, yet of course infinitely better than no town at all.

Louise, as she walked down the one business street of the place, scarcely looked to right or left. She knew every nook and angle of the town—at least so she believed. Having come up now so many summers, wasn't it reasonable to suppose that one would eventually exhaust all the slender resources of a

place like this? And yet, had her eyes been really open she would perhaps have been amazed to behold spread about her a wealth of life undreamed of. Something rich and new in *Frankfort*? Yes, possibly even here. For those individuals in aprons, weighing out sugar and measuring potatoes so humbly, are not, as a matter of fact, mere shop fixtures, as they have always seemed. The clerk at the soda fountain, who will cheerfully dish up ice cream for the hoodlums when they return hot and famished from their walk on the pier, has, after all, other interests in life than syrups and fizz—unimportant, it may be, yet interests, nevertheless. Yon fat and shabby patriarch, who sits so calmly all day long tilted back in a red armchair outside the drygoods store, is something more, at least potentially, than a painted barber's pole. Inside the drygoods store, although Miss Needham has overlooked her, is the old man's grand-daughter, busily working, dreaming. She works hard all summer so she can go to school winters in Grand Rapids. She has a sweetheart in Grand Rapids, who is taking a business course; they are planning to be married sometime in the sweet by-and-bye.

But one with the enormous and stirring preoccupations of Louise Needham could hardly be expected to look on life with open eyes, or, so to say, analytically. Appreciations must bow and conform. A breezy, impressionistic sort of synthesis is the background such a mentally and emotionally active

person seems inevitably to evolve. As it was with the sunrise, so was it also with the people of the world not personally bound up in her destiny. It really wasn't a deliberate narrowness, but simply a sensible recognition of time's limitations. Certainly the living of one's own personal life must always count first.

Reminiscent and dreaming, she passed down the street, while out at sea the steamer drew closer and closer. In one gaily decorated shop window was displayed an array of summer fiction: alluring titles, with often most astonishing jackets—all the season's best sellers, backed up by certain surviving relics of bygone seasons. There were actually volumes in this window (though now badly faded and of course occupying appropriately inferior positions) which had been the avowed, the lauded best sellers during that summertime, long flown, when Louise and Harold Gates indulged in so free an interchange of kisses. There had been, as a matter of fact, rather a profusion of kisses in the best sellers that year, also: how true they were, after all, to life—that best of all best sellers!

Miss Needham paused before the window. Her eyes were irresistibly drawn to examine the miscellany, fruitage of so many seasons, badges of so much smart selling. In the midst of the conglomeration she spied a certain volume, modest in title and hue as compared with some of the others, though still extravagant enough of text, which Leslie had

been telling her about. It was a long historical novel, and Leslie had expressed himself as well pleased with it. He hadn't, as a matter of downright fact, read the book all through, but had skimmed along, omitting all descriptions and the pages where the author philosophized about life. But he had captured the gist of the story, and had retold it to Louise one afternoon while they strolled together in delicious solitude through Lovers' Lane. And she had promised him she would read the book some time and give him her opinion—it going without saying that her opinion, at least to him, would be of moment. Louise was no great reader—certainly not an inveterate reader of long historical novels. Nevertheless, as her eye now encountered it nestling there in the window, a sudden caprice swept her right inside the shop. It was a most amazing thing, but the next moment she found herself telling the clerk she wished to purchase the volume. And then—he fished it out.

The clerk, it must be communicated—a man, by the way, with all sorts of interesting and even enthralling human complexes which Louise did not dream of suspecting, since she knew the town so well—was rather surprised that his early morning customer should desire this particular book rather than some of the more gripping things: *Diana's Secret*, for instance, which was easily one of the most successful works ever exploited in Frankfort. However, since he had long ago given up all hope of

ever selling the historical romance, and since he expected to run out of *Diana* copies before the season was ended, the clerk naturally offered no comment upon her choice. Covertly blowing a little dust off the book she had asked for, he wrapped it up, and handed it over the counter.

Louise was by this time mildly self-reproachful. "How silly of me to walk right in like that and buy it!" she sighed. "With the money—let's see. What could I have bought instead . . . ?"

But however nimbly her mind might exert itself in estimating the complete badness of her bargain, the book went under her arm. Just a kind of giddy, final fling, she argued.

As she proceeded on her way, the girl kept assuring herself that the embrace of the historic romance was decidedly more playful than serious. It would be amusing later on—oh, perhaps a great deal later on—to show Leslie she had been as good as her word. Possibly she might actually *read* the book—who could tell?—just to please him. Poor Les! After all, he was only a boy. She was two years his senior. It would be foolish of them to think of each other, even were her heart perfectly free.

"Of course it's all right," she said, "for us to be the finest sort of friends; but it must stop there. If I'd guessed how serious a thing it was going to turn out for him I'd have seen it wasn't right to let him think he had any chance. . . ."

This, to tell the truth, tended to put it all rather more satisfactorily than had hitherto seemed possible. She was quite pleased, in fact, for it left her in the attitude of repeating "Poor Les!"

Well, yes, she had thrown him over, she admitted —in a certain sense. But only in a sense; and anyway it had to be so. However shallow her reasoning might often appear to others—however often it might fail of horizon—Miss Needham was herself seldom conscious of the slightest insincerity at the time. She had inherited, it is true, a certain intellectual shiftiness from the parent most afflicted with a similar disorder; but however often she might fluctuate to a new point of view, so long as she actually held to it the conception possessed for her all the earmarks of probity and permanence.

"Poor Les! No, no. . . . I shouldn't have encouraged him so much. . . ." But she hadn't thought at first that Lynndal was coming. And Arizona is very, very far away—especially on fine summer nights, when one isn't wearing any ring. . . .

Yet presently the book under her arm began to appear a somewhat awkward possession. However easy it might be for her to *tell* Leslie they must be merely friends now, and however blithely she might *ask* him, after an ancient and at best pretty hackneyed ideal, to look upon her as a sister, it was going to be very hard—for him. Wasn't it? Could it

be otherwise than hard for him? Wouldn't her having bought the book, even, especially if he learned she had bought it, make it all still harder?

Louise was naturally so quick in her sympathies that it troubled her when others couldn't attain as convenient solutions for their problems as she generally did for her own. And being herself party to another's unhappiness would, of course, tend to add certain pricks of conscience to any of the more abstract, though still altruistic, sentiments she might feel. "Well," she admitted, "I guess I shouldn't have bought the book, after all—at least not just now." But of course she could keep it hidden. "I needn't show it to Les right away." For that matter, need she ever show it to him? "I suppose—I really suppose I might drop it into the harbour, and be forever rid of it!"

As though, indeed, determined to act upon this dramatic impulse, Louise turned and walked down amongst some fishermen's huts at the water's edge. Most of the fishermen were out at sea, having not yet brought in the morning's haul from the nets. The rude little huts, where the fish were cleaned and packed in ice for shipping, and where the nets were washed, stood idly open. The early sunshine lay across their doorsteps. Some children were at play, running in and out; and before one of the huts a very old woman sat mending a net, working her hard fingers in a quick, intelligent way.

Louise walked out upon a little plank dock which was flung, at this point, into the harbour. The fishermen used the dock when they unloaded their cargoes of fish. It did not extend a great way; but from its extremity, as she faced westward, she perceived the approach of a steamer, still out in the "Big Lake," but nearing the harbour channel. It was probably Lynndal's boat, though it might possibly be one of the Ann Arbor car ferries from across Lake Michigan. She must hurry to the wharf. Still, the notion of throwing the book away persisted. She must rid herself of every vestige of the past. She must come to Lynndal—and it was quite thrilling to put it that way—empty-handed! This would seem to be a formal, a conclusive, even a rather grand way of marking a close to this surreptitious, this unfortunate, yet this of course sufficiently innocent little affair with Leslie—poor Les! Yes, it would be the fitting mark of conclusion; after that her heart would be swept clean. She grasped the book. At first she thought she would fling it far out; then that she would just quietly drop it in. But after all, she slipped the book under her arm again, and made her way hurriedly back to the village street.

Her mind was busy with explanation and a readjustment not, a moment ago, foreseen. "It would have been foolish and stagy to have done that. No, it wouldn't have been *right!* Perhaps—" yes, per-

haps Hilda would want to read it some day. She brightened. "Leslie said there was much instructive reading in it." Why, yes—the book would do for Hilda, if not for her. Mightn't Hilda even do for Leslie, now that she had thrown him over? Ah, it might be so! The idea occurred to Louise at first as a mere flash of whimsy; however, second thought made the possibility rather too possible to be altogether agreeable. . . .

"Why, I should think it would be the most natural thing in the world," she assured herself. "Of course Hilda's awfully young, but I should think it would be perfectly splendid if they came to care for each other in time. I'm sure it would make it ever so much easier for *me*." She remembered how oddly her sister had behaved earlier in the day, whenever Leslie was mentioned; how Leslie himself had promised Hilda he would be back in time to play in the tennis tournament with her. "I think it would be just splendid!" she thought. "I'll encourage it, of course, all I can!"

At last, she felt, there was a real solution in sight for poor Les. It would be the very thing! She was so pleased that she laughed aloud as she passed the fat and shabby patriarch tilted back in his red armchair before the drygoods store. But it is possible that even the patriarch, in a philosophy of age as opposed to that of youth, merely thought, as he saw her go by: "Another of the resorters." In-

deed, it is even possible that he did not see her at all.

The steamer drew in through the channel. It was the coast steamer from Ludington, and connected with the Milwaukee line. Louise stood eagerly beside the freight house, peering up at the passengers on the deck. Naturally she was very much excited, and experienced a swift, enveloping sense of joyous romance in being there to welcome the man she expected some day to marry.

To marry!

Suddenly it occurred to her that, after all, she had hardly thought of it *once* that way! Yes, Lynndal was the man who would be her husband. Marrying him—no, she had somehow barely thought of that part. . . . Nevertheless, though the discovery was a little staggering, she strained her eyes quite gaily for a first glimpse of him; wondered if he would look to her just the way he looked during those few days when they had been together in Arizona. But just how, by the way, did he look then? All at once she thought of Lynndal Barry as an almost absolute stranger! It was an inexplicable but quite vivid, a rather terrifying sensation. It made the roots of her hair faintly prickle. No, for the life of her she couldn't think of any one's being a more perfect stranger than Lynndal!

Louise wasn't mystically inclined. Yet what she

felt seemed almost a kind of foreboding. Then she laughed to herself, a gay little nervous laugh. And she told herself it was only natural one should feel this way, and that it was all a part of her charming, her really absorbing romance.

8

HE was standing by the rail on the upper deck of the steamer, beside a man with whom he appeared to be in conversation. She had no difficulty, after all, in recognizing him. Barry was still the tallish, brown-moustached, quiet-eyed man who had so generously exerted himself to make her brief stay in Arizona agreeable.

She saw him first, the advantage giving her time to look away again before his eyes discovered her. Just why she should want to look away was in the nature of a mystery; yet avert her eyes she certainly did, as she might have done in the case of a stranger whose presence had casually attracted her notice. The feeling that, despite what had passed between them under the discreet propulsion of government postage, she did not really know this man, returned stronger than ever. She smiled a little—she had to—at her own manifest perversity; and flushed vaguely, too.

As soon as Lynndal Barry discovered Miss Needham down on the dock his face lighted, and he grasped the arm of the man standing beside him.

"There she is!" he cried.

His companion looked, but was a moment or two trying to decide which of the several very possible young ladies standing about near the freight house might prove to be *she*. To facilitate the other's search, Barry pointed. And Louise, observing the gesture out of the corner of an eye, coloured and turned still more away, maintaining, after all, though she had been just on the point of abandoning it, the pretense that she had not yet seen the man to welcome whom she had risen so early and come so far.

Somehow, a wrong note had been struck. Even the Rev. Needham—and his views on culture were widely known—had often cautioned his girls against pointing at persons or things in public. Lynndal ought not to have pointed. Yes, it was a wrong note —and a wrong note just at the most critical time. Of course in poising this action of his, Louise, it is quite patent, now failed to consider one thing; she failed, because perversely and momentarily she was out of mood, to consider that a young man who has travelled hundreds of miles to see a young lady he expects to marry would rather naturally be so carried away at the first sight of her that manners wouldn't count for the full weight of their every-day prestige. Great events sanction great exceptions. But Louise, now, was not prepared to make the requisite allowances. She had thought that her heart was swept clean; but it wasn't. What demon was it which had lured her into thinking so long

about Richard and Leslie and—and all the others while she waited for the boat to come in?

Yes, to her it really seemed that a wrong note had been struck. Miss Needham found herself in an oddly cool and critical mood—certainly not the mood she had anticipated. The next moment it softened; a feeling of shy warmth stole upon her. Still, she half wished that she had decided, after all, not to come to Frankfort, but had been content to await him quietly at home. That would have given her, if nothing else, a certain reserve of dignity, which she felt now was somehow sacrificed. Did not her being here on the wharf to meet him make her appear too eager? Would it not have been much better to come forward gracefully out of a romantic nowhere, perhaps even after keeping him waiting a few minutes? Then, at least, she needn't have undergone the minor humiliation—wasn't it almost that?—of being pointed at. She pressed the book under her arm. Suddenly she thought of Richard and his exquisite manners. . . .

Lynndal was waving his hat now, trying desperately to attract her attention. The captain of the vessel was making rather a poor landing, and the sharp little reverse and forward signals in the engine-room kept sounding repeatedly. A strip of water still lay between the ship and the wharf, though crew huskies stood ready to heave out the gang-plank as soon as it became possible to establish shore connections. Louise interested herself in the rougher

activities aboard ship, and did not yet raise her eyes to the man who now stood almost directly above her. She felt conscious of a sum of stares in her direction. All the girls on the wharf had taken full note of the pointed finger and the waving hat. Each knew—and some, perhaps, not without regret—that these demonstrations did not apply to *her*. A quick inventory of wharf possibilities had convinced all present that it must be Miss Needham who was the impetuously favoured individual. He had seemed to look quite squarely at her, and she alone had not bestowed on his pains the gaze of unfortunately lacking acquaintance.

At length one of the younger girls, standing near her, touched Louise's arm. "Some one's trying to catch your eye," she said. And she nodded up toward Barry.

He observed the girl's action and called down: "Louise, dear, here I am—up here!"

And then it was that she relented, at last—thrilled a little—raised her face coyly to him, and smiled.

No, she would not appear too eager. Let him not think he was winning her too cheaply. "Did you have a pleasant trip across?" she asked.

Just the faintest shade of disappointment crossed his face. "Oh, yes," he replied. "Smooth as glass. How are you, dear?"

She merely nodded. The historical novel slipped out from under her arm and fell to the ground. She stooped hurriedly and picked it up.

"My, it's good to see you!" he communicated through a hubbub which really made it difficult to be heard.

But she was again prevented, or spared, a reply, by having to step quickly aside as the gang-plank was run out. The ship was at last securely moored. Barry's grey-haired companion called his attention to this fact, and then the two men seized their bags and hurried down.

Louise stepped aside to wait; realized an augmenting sense of strangeness and quandary—her heart in a kind of flutter. She felt now hot, now cold. An odd, frantic resolve raced through her brain: "He mustn't kiss me!" And yet—for there was a conflicting after-flash—to have him make no attempt would constitute the very essence itself of pique! In the midst of this rather extraordinary mood, Louise recoiled, as it were, and shook herself. She called her mental turmoil silly and maudlin; she even called it wicked. Then Lynndal came, and the terrible moment passed, leaving her banners waving. Emphatically it had been in his mind to kiss her; any one could plainly see that; the act itself, however (for he must *not* feel too sure), she forestalled by a very delicate but at the same time unmistakable gesture of repulsion, unto which he bowed with a graceful disappointment that, for the time being, very materially lightened the prospect. She had won in the first skirmish; and the knowledge of victory, the delicious sense of power in her it

seemed to emphasize, put her in an easier, more cheerful frame of mind.

Instead of kissing Lynndal, she held out her hand to him with shy cordiality. She fancied, in a whimsical flash, that she was meeting him all over again, for the first time. A subtle sense of romance in this new aspect of their relationship quickened her heart. . . .

Barry's shipboard companion was still at his side. Or rather not quite at his side, either, but holding discreetly back—even courteously discovering a sudden optical interest in another quarter of the compass. From this thoughtful detachment he was recalled and introduced as Mr. Barrett O'Donnell.

Miss Needham was delighted to make his acquaintance—Miss Needham would have welcomed, just then, an acquaintance with the man in the moon, no matter how outlandish he might prove. For the moment, if in a way delightful, was also complex and curiously taut. O'Donnell jollied things up. His was a ready tongue, with, now and then, just a whisper of Irish; his smile was droll and cheering, though perhaps rather too facile—too facile, that is (for it was perfectly sincere), to be ever quite enveloping. Louise walked between them, and the three made their way to the railroad station, where the locomotive of a "resort special" was puffing quite prodigiously, and pretending, after the manner of locomotives, to be ever on the verge of pulling right out, mindless of schedule.

Miss Needham skipped with hectic and perverse coquetry. She stimulated herself anew upon the assurance that it was great fun having a lover to meet. And it was really fine, for another thing, to be able so perfectly to dominate the scene, disposing all according to her whim—best of all, to have another man right there on the spot to behold these palpable wonders! She remembered, with a tiny obscure pang, how she had wished Richard might be present to see what amazing progress she had made. Richard she could not have; but fortune provided a substitute in the unsuspecting person of jolly Mr. O'Donnell.

Louise's mood of almost saucy pleasure was sufficiently generous to overflow in Barry's favour, else the poor man would surely have shivered himself to death ere this. She smiled up at him with more artlesssness than really consorted with her triumph.

"Hilda was afraid you might not come," she chatted pleasantly, flirting a little with the corners of her mouth.

"She was?"

"Yes, she was dreadfully worried—you know how children are. She'll be awfully relieved when she sees you."

"But you," he asked, half jestingly and half in faint earnest, "—you weren't afraid?"

"I? Oh, no!" She laughed along with the denial. "Not *I*."

The locomotive was coughing and wheezing and snorting, with an air of absurd importance. All at once there was a tremendous exhaust which sent steam geysering in considerable volume to either side. They were so close that the roar brought a tightening to the girl's throat. Barry touched her arm, gently insinuating her out of the path of the steam's dominion. She felt the momentary pressure of his fingers. And through the hiss and dizzy vibration in the air it was as though he were saying to her: "You are mine, all mine! You are mine forever and ever! You can belong henceforth to no one but me!" She trembled and felt faint. Her heart was beset with goblins and ghosts. . . .

When they had settled for the diminutive journey, Louise was more than ever glad of Mr. O'Donnell's presence. But now it was no longer so much that he might behold the brilliance of her autocracy as that she might lean upon him while striving to adjust herself to the almost alarming situation Barry's arrival had precipitated. And O'Donnell, for his own part, was not a little flattered at being so deluged with attention from a pretty woman—especially since she had a real, live lover sitting right beside her! The lover himself took everything in a perfectly philosophical manner. Naturally she didn't want to reveal her heart to the wide world, his comfortable acquiescence seemed to say. She was reserving all that for him alone. And in the meantime it was very decent and intelligent of her to be nice to his

friend. As a matter of fact, Miss Needham's conduct wasn't by any means so sheer and vivid as the complex which produced it; she was not behaving nearly so strangely as she felt.

The journey back to Beulah, disproportionately lengthy if measured on the dial of one's watch, was under way. All the coaches were packed with resorters plying off in search of adventure—adventure which, in its most substantial form, could they but know it, they were to discover inside those mysterious covered baskets stowed away under seats and, sometimes rather precariously, on the metal racks overhead. For eating is, after all, the Great Adventure in Middle Western resort life. One might perhaps hesitate about putting it ahead of canoes in the moonlight, and that indispensable adjunct of every resort that ever was, the Lovers' Lane. But whereas the latter phenomena appeal to only a single age or mood of society, the adventure of filling the stomach appeals to everyone alike, old and young, mighty and humble. So far as the present excursionists were concerned, the furtive covers were soon flapping; and the air grew tropical with the persuasive aroma of bananas.

Louise sat beside her lover in the midst of these not unfamiliar scenes; and the outcome of her half agreeable, half harrowing mental complex was a slightly hysterical gaiety. So long as Mr. O'Donnell was with them, she felt secure. But why *was* this? Why was it she suddenly dreaded the thought of

finding herself for the first time alone with Lynndal? Phantoms swarmed. In her letters she had given him every promise. Yet now he was with her again, she dared not let herself go. Phantoms of old delight; phantoms, too, projected into the scope of an imagined future. . . . The words she had seemed to hear while the steam brought that queer stuffiness to her throat, still echoed troublingly: "You are mine, all mine! You can belong henceforth to no one—but to me!" Her mind was all charged with a brooding unrest. Externally she sparkled and was blithe; but within lurked a vague fever of apprehension. . . .

Things like this may conceivably be going on in almost any one's mind at almost any time; but they are never shown. We are adepts when it comes to guarding our guilty struggles.

The train was winding its way through dismal swamp country. Stark trunks of trees, stripped of verdure, with the life in them long extinct, stood knee-deep in brackish water. Though the day was quite bright, an impenetrable veil of melancholy lay over the swamplands—a gloom never lifted, which seemed the child of silence and stagnation. The sad blight of the landscape seeped into her heart. She was twisting her life this way and that, absorbed, as usual, in the mystery of her own fascinating if at present rather menaced ego.

Lynndal Barry and his companion, chatting, seemed unaware of the girl's momentary absorption;

her curious, almost breathless, detachment. Although detached, she was nevertheless looking at Barry with serious, half-seeing eyes. And all at once she found herself thinking of him respectfully, even tenderly. There was something conspicuously ordered and kindly and calm about him. She seemed, abruptly, conscious of a great patience in this man who had come to her out of the West; had scarcely discovered in his letters how essentially mature he was. But the next moment this vaguely annoyed her. She seemed to miss in him the thrill of fire and passion which her nature craved. He seemed to be relaxed upon the snug hearth-rug of life—yes, in slippers! Barry was, actually, not much above thirty; but his seemed to her now a poise unwelcome. She fingered the book in her lap with nervous, groping fingers; even shuddered a little as she gazed off across the swamp.

Barry, however, seemed aware of none of the girl's emotional fluxes. Why should he be? How *could* he be? Barry didn't even in the least suspect that she had any such things as emotional fluxes in her make-up; nor, for that matter, was it likely he would quite know an emotional flux if he should meet it. This must not, however, be taken to signify that Barry wasn't sensitive, for he was. And he had a way, too, of biding his time, which sometimes deceived people into thinking him invulnerable to the finer antennæ of feelings. However, though his ear was not entirely deaf to the unstrummed music of

life, he did not as yet suspect—or if so, not more than just glancingly—that there was to be a flaw in his eager little romance.

"Oh, yes, it will surprise her completely, of course," O'Donnell was saying.

"You haven't written at all, then?"

"You see, I've only just learned she was back from Tahulamaji. I learned about it in town. I may say I learned of it only yesterday!"

"It's queer, isn't it," remarked Barry, with almost a flash of imagination, "we should have happened to come up on the same steamer?"

And then, being just a delightful, sane, normal individual, O'Donnell said what *had* to be said—what is *always* said when talk reaches such a point: He said that the world was small.

Louise came back to them with an effort. The train was beginning to draw up out of the swamp region, and on to a plain better adapted to rural uses. The sunshine lay very bright upon the grass. An emotion of hope stirred in her heart. Everything was bound to turn out for the best—*her* best, she thought. Of course it would! She felt all at once radiantly, boundlessly happy. And she forgot the words in the steam, when his fingers had touched her arm.

The subject of this miraculous meeting of Barry and O'Donnell still animated a conversation which she entered with almost desperate eagerness.

"You weren't acquainted before you met on the boat?"

"Never laid eyes on each other," laughed the Irishman. "We began talking about dry-farming in the gentlemen's lounge, and from that, gradually. . . ."

"The fact is," put in Barry, who wanted to see what little mystery there was cleared up as quickly as possible, "we found we were both on our way to—"

"—to besiege ladies living under the same roof!" concluded the other's readier tongue.

Barry coloured a bit at the bluntness, but rather with pleasure than embarrassment.

"I guess I don't quite understand," remarked Louise a little coolly.

"Well, you see, the fact is we're very old friends, Miss Whitcom and I—"

"Aunt Marjie!"

"Yes—Marjie. . . ." He repeated the name slowly, and with the sly relish of one who is not quite sure whether he would dare perpetrate such an indulgence in the presence of the adored herself.

"Why, how perfectly *romantic!*" cried Louise. And she ceased entirely, for the moment, to be concerned about the puzzling and rather tangled romance of her own life.

"You say you haven't seen each other for years?"

"Five years," he nodded.

"Oh, how surprised she *will* be! I do certainly want to be there when she first sees you!"

For of course it went without saying that they were lovers. Only fancy! Well—as much had been said outright. He was coming to besiege Aunt Marjie, just as Lynndal. . . .

Her heart clouded a little with the mist of perplexity which seemed, now, to have begun settling the moment she heard Leslie's step outside on the hillside at dawn. . . .

But O'Donnell went on nonchalantly enough: "Oh, but there'll be nothing remarkable at all. Miss Whitcom, if you'll pardon my speaking quite freely of your relative, has the most extraordinary control. Perhaps you've noticed it. I can tell you just what she'll do. She'll talk about the new wall paper in the throne room of the Queen of Tahulamaji's palace. Or else it will be still some perfectly commonplace remark about a tiresome old swimming medal. But exclamations in the true sense? No, there won't be any, Miss Needham, I assure you."

Oh, Eros! Here, sitting all perplexed beside the man she has promised to marry—all besieged by ghosts of her past loves, and the ghost of one scarce passed as yet—is a woman. And yonder in a cottage, covering the unlucky shortage of pancakes with mundane chuckles, is another woman who has been pursued for twenty years by one dauntless lover, and who, when he comes, will talk about the paper on the wall.

The journey drew to a screeching and bumping close; the brakes whistled, and the locomotive fell a-panting most lustily, as though to proclaim that it had done a mighty thing indeed in hauling a few laden coaches a dozen miles across the swamp-lands.

The intrepid *Pathfinder* lay at the dock, waiting. All Beulah had turned out, it really seemed, to welcome the train; and now all Beulah swarmed down to bid those who would embark farewell.

There was the mayor—or so one fancied; and there were aldermen—could not one fairly see them sitting in solemn council? There was the Methodist minister in his half-clerical week-day togs; there were all the old men of the town, and all the old ladies; all the boys and girls and babies; together with just as many others as could possibly be spared from conducting the business of the town. The dock was quite crowded. Yet Louise and her two companions were the only passengers the *Pathfinder* was to bear away.

There always seemed something vaguely symbolic about these important departures of the *Pathfinder*. The townsfolk seemed to gaze off with a kind of wistful regret—yes, from the mayor down to the tinest babe. It always was so: as though the *Pathfinder* were bound for free, large spaces of ocean; for ports in Europe, or the Indies. And the townspeople could only assemble on the shore and silently watch this ship's glorious westward flight. So life went.

Many are called, but few are chosen!

PART TWO

The Kiss

1

LESLIE had some trouble with his engine on the return trip. It sputtered and it balked. The never very regular rhythm grew more and more broken, till at length there was no rhythm left at all. Finally the thing simply stopped dead; it wouldn't budge. The little craft rippled forward a few paces on momentum, then swung into a choppy trough and began edging dismally back toward Beulah. Leslie was glad then that Louise wasn't aboard. Yes, he was very glad indeed there were no ladies present. He sat down in the bottom of the boat and took the engine to pieces. Then he put it together again. And tossed and tossed. And drifted. And cursed like a man.

When at last he limped up to the dock at Crystalia, missing fire horribly, and having to help along by poling as soon as the water was sufficiently shallow, he found Hilda waiting for him. She smiled very brightly. And somehow he felt the unpleasantness of the voyage fading into a plain sense of satisfaction over being back. It seemed a singularly long time since he had set out with Louise. . . .

"Good morning!" Hilda called to him from the dock.

He nodded and grinned; and poled, perhaps, the more vigorously. With his foot he desperately prodded the almost exhausted engine.

"Why *Les*, what's the *matter?*" she cried. For he was, in truth, a sight.

"Stalled two miles out," he replied bluntly, though not curtly, giving the engine a final kick by way of advising it that its labours for the day were at an end.

"Why, Les—how dreadful! Oh, I can't help laughing. Your face *is* so funny!"

He made a grimace and rubbed his cheeks with the sleeve of his flannel shirt, not particularly improving matters thereby.

"I don't want the old thing any more—it's just so much junk!" He stepped out on the dock and moored the naughty little craft, though without any great enthusiasm, and rather as though he hoped a strong wind would come and carry the miscreant irrevocably to sea. Then he added: "Hilda, I've got an idea! I'll auction it off and turn over the proceeds to your father's missionary fund!"

Her laugh rang.

"Don't you think that would be a good idea?"

"Oh, Les—you're *so* funny!"

She laughed a great deal as they walked along together through the hot white sand toward the Crystalia cottages, occupied mostly by Chicago–Oak Park people, and forming no part of what was generally known as the religious colony. Leslie was by

this time entirely over his maritime grouch. He conceived, always in his elusively serious way, a delight in being quite as "funny" as he could. An outsider might have registered the impression that, even at his funniest, Leslie wasn't honestly amusing enough to elicit such frequent, rich, joyous peals of laughter; but Hilda was very happy—happy!—so happy that she needed no deliberate stimulus to mirth; so happy she could with the utmost ease shift her mood from grave to gay, or from gay to grave, matching the mood of her companion.

"I know you've forgotten," she said, swinging along beside him and occasionally flashing up a most captivating glance.

"Forgotten what?"

"I'll never tell!"

"Then how can I know what I've forgotten, if you don't remind me?" Though gossamer at best, it had an effect of logic—perhaps a rather graspable masculine logic, at that.

"Maybe you'll remember—when it's too late." Her eyes sparkled.

"Oh, you mean the tournament?"

She nodded.

"I hadn't forgotten it."

"Well, you see I was afraid you had."

He smiled. She was really quite delightful.

"I'm so glad, Les. There'll be time for you to get into light things. Oh, I'm so glad your memory *didn't* really fail!"

He looked at her quietly a moment, but her gaze was now all on the sun-patterned turf. They had entered the forest of Betsey, and were pursuing the winding road toward the Point.

"Oh, that's nothing," he said solemnly. "I never forget appointments with ladies."

She laughed again, then ventured: "Tell me. Didn't you forget, just the tiniest little bit, when you were taking Louise across, or," she rather hurried on, "when you were out there in the middle of the lake and the engine was acting up? Please be ever so honest!"

Leslie looked down again at the girl beside him. Odd he had never noticed how intelligent and shyly grown-up Hilda was! She had been merely Louise's little sister; all at once she became *Hilda*, a self-sufficient entity, perfectly capable of standing alone. Also she looked very fresh and charming this morning in her cool white jumper and skirt. He looked at Hilda in a kind of searching way; then, pleasantly meeting her eyes, he answered her question. "No, not even the tiniest little bit."

Their walk together through the forest was enlivened with gay and unimportant chatter. As they passed the hidden bower where Hilda, at an earlier hour, had crouched to spy and listen, the girl almost danced at the thought of having so delightfully usurped her sister's place. And the best part of it was that it was perfectly all right; because Louise had gone to meet her own true lover. Leslie didn't

belong to Louise; it seemed almost too wonderful to be true that he didn't!

As it happened, Louise entered the lad's thoughts also as he and Hilda walked side by side along the sylvan path. Perhaps something of the same odd transposition weighed, even with him. He had gone this identical way with some one else, only a few eternities ago. He had held her in his arms a moment, and then. . . . Then what was it she had said? Friends! First she had said she cared, and after that she had said she wanted. . . . Did she really know *what* she wanted? For weeks they had gone around together constantly. The moon had been wonderful. Then the letter had come from the West, and she had decided she had better begin being a nice, harmless sister. Still, she had let him kiss her once, even after the advent of the fatal epistle—a sort of passionate farewell surrender—wanted to let him down as easy as possible. Ugh! He was in no mood to spare her now. And then Leslie came slowly back; back to the bright, rare summer morning; back to the forest of Betsey, with its hopeful glints of sunshine; back—to Hilda. He sighed. At least he had learned something more about women.

They came to Beachcrest Cottage, and, since Leslie's cottage was further along, in the direction of the lighthouse, it was here they parted. Before he ran off, however, to make himself presentable, Leslie underwent the ordeal (pleasant rather than not

as it turned out), of being introduced to Miss Whitcom.

She was seated on the second step of the flight leading up to the screened porch, seemed in very good spirits, and was writing a letter—employing a last year's magazine as base of operations. The ink bottle balanced itself just on the edge of the next step up: a key, if one please, to Marjory Whitcom's whole character. Had she been writing at the cottage desk in the living room, where everything was convenient, then she would never, never have spent her life doing wild and impossible things. And had the ink bottle been placed firmly instead of upon the raged edge, then, having eluded Barrett O'Donnell all these years, she would not now be writing to him.

"Aunt Marjie," said Hilda, her eyes shining and her cheeks flushed, "this is Leslie."

He was pleased to meet Miss Whitcom, but assured her he must deny himself the pleasure of shaking hands. Look at them! He had had his engine all to pieces. He was going to auction off the boat now and give the Rev. Needham's missionary fund the first real boost in a decade.

"Leslie!" hushed Hilda in great dismay. How did they know but the Rev. Needham might be within hearing distance?

But Miss Whitcom laughed delightedly, whether or no, and said that after hearing such a gallant expression of religious zeal she simply must shake

his hand, grime and all. And she did so. She had a way of winning young men completely.

"And did you pilot my elder niece over to Beulah before we sleepyheads here at home were even stirring?"

"Yes, Aunt Marjie. It was Leslie. You know!" And Hilda blushed at her very vagueness, which swept back so quaintly to embrace the pancake catastrophe.

"Oh, yes," replied Miss Whitcom with dreadful pointedness. "I know—oh, yes. I know very well *indeed!* And I know of a certain young lady who departed and forgot to turn off the burners of the stove, so that plain, humdrum mortals must quit the table hungry—positively hungry!"

Leslie somehow managed to establish connections. "Whatever happened, I'm afraid I was partly to blame, Miss Whitcom."

"Aha! Only partly?" For she fancied his chivalry carried along with it a tone, so far as he was concerned, of extenuation.

"Well, I suppose having me there, talking, helped to make her forget."

"H'm!" She eyed him in her odd, sharp way. But he looked back with a half understanding defiance. "So you won't take *all* the blame?"

Leslie smote the lower step with his foot, then shyly glanced at Hilda. Hilda laughed and coloured.

So Miss Whitcom said, looking drolly off to sea: "The plot thickens!"

And she was right; there were greater doings ahead.

Leslie sprang off along the ridge to get into tennis garb. He decided, as was only natural, that the one infallible way of cleansing himself was to plunge into the sea. He was consequently in his little cottage bedroom about two minutes, and then emerged in swimming apparel.

Leslie was well-formed and sun-browned. He sped off over the sand to the shore, and thence dived straight out of sight.

"Swims rather well," commented Miss Whitcom. "That crawl stroke isn't by any means the easiest to master."

"Yes, Leslie's the best swimmer on the Point," said Hilda proudly.

Miss Whitcom dipped her pen, but the ink went dry on it, and the letter lay uncompleted.

"I do believe he's forgotten all about you and is going to swim straight across!" she declared. For Leslie was, indeed, streaking out in fine style, making the water splash in the sun, and occasionally tossing his head as though keenly conscious of life's delightfulness.

"He'll turn back," said Hilda quietly.

"You think so?"

"I know he will!" she laughed.

"Oh, you *know?*"

"Why how ridiculous! Nobody could swim clear across, Aunt Marjie. It's seventy miles!"

"Really?"

"Did you ever hear of anybody swimming as far as that?"

"I'm not sure I ever did," the other admitted. They were silent a little, both watching the swimmer. Then the lady remarked in a dreamy way: "They always look so fine and free when they're young, and the sun flashes over the water, and they make straight out, as though they never meant to stop at all."

Hilda was a little at a loss to know how this rather curious speech should be taken. She felt dimly that there was something below the surface, as so frequently there seemed to be when Aunt Marjie spoke; but at first she couldn't imagine what it was.

"So fine and free," Miss Whitcom repeated in the same tone. "They make straight out. But they always turn back."

And then Hilda asked, giving voice to a sudden bold dart of intuitive understanding: "You mean men, Aunt Marjie?"

Whereupon her aunt laughed away the odd impulse of symbolism. "Yes, the men, Hilda. They try to carry us off our feet in the beginning. They want us to believe they're young gods. And they

can't understand why some of us are coming to grow sceptical, and why we're beginning to want to try our hand at a few things ourselves."

"He's turning around now!" cried Hilda, who was not paying the very best sort of attention.

"Yes, poor dears," the other persisted. "The other shore *would* be too far off."

"Oh, much too far!" agreed Hilda, jumping up to wave her hand.

Whatever Aunt Marjie might be getting at, Hilda, for her part, was ever so glad of the sea's prohibitive vastness.

2

THE Rev. and Mrs. Needham came out on to the porch, he preceding her through the doorway; there was just the faintest evidence of her shoving him on a little.

Her whispered "Yes, Alf, yes!" might, of course, represent an exclamation apropos of almost anything. For instance, the words might form the tail-end of almost any sort of domestic conversation—or perhaps a talk about holding a Sunday School rally in the fall. The incomplete phrase might, in one's imagination, expand itself into something like this: "Yes, we really must. Nothing like a well-planned rally to stir up the interest of the young folks. Yes, Alf, yes!" But as a matter of fact, Mrs. Needham and her husband had not been discussing any such matters. The authentic conversation, to go back a little, which had just antedated egress from the cottage living room, ran, in fact, as follows:

"Alf, I do want you two to get better acquainted!"

"What?"

"More intimate, and not. . . ."

"Well, Anna?"

"Not quite so—so stiff, somehow. . . ."

"H'm-m-m!"

"Alf, she's *so* good-hearted. If it's true she has changed any way, who knows but you might have an influence. . . ?"

He sighed heavily. They stood facing each other. It became a little formal.

"Alf, this would be a splendid chance. She's right out there on the steps!"

"Oh, well—really! Not this morning. No, not just now, when we're all keyed up about Barry. In the course of time, I daresay. . . ."

"Oh, *now*, Alf," she coaxed, in a very low, throaty, persuasive contralto. "Oh, do go out there now! I'll call Hilda in for something. There's—there's some mending—ought to be done right away," she quickly added, as the suspicion hovered between them that Hilda would be called in on mere pretense.

"Anna, maybe this afternoon."

"Now! Oh, Alf—*now*!"

"Anna, I—"

"Yes, Alf, yes!"

And so he was gently pushed on to the porch.

Hilda and Marjory looked up. There was a barricade of mosquito netting between them and the emerged pair. Hilda was flushed. She had just been waving to some one in the water. Marjory's eyes kindled with indefinite mirth, and at this kindling the minister's heart quaked a little. There was something about his wife's sister—yes, he thoroughly admitted it now; there was something about her. She was strange and incompatible. Had she, in-

deed, become inclined to be atheistical in her beliefs? Was that what made him feel so uncomfortable, always, in her presence? He a man of the pulpit, it would be natural that the ungodly should fill him with distrust; natural they should make him wary and cautious. Was it that in Marjory? *Was it that?*

"Hilda, see here a minute," said Mrs. Needham; and she beckoned discreetly. Hilda followed her mother into the cottage.

This left the Rev. Needham on one side of the screening and Miss Whitcom on the other. Miss Whitcom still sat on the second step with the pen in her hand. She had dipped the pen a good many times, but the letter was no further advanced. She turned to watch Leslie get in the last full strokes and crawl out. He lay in the hot sand a moment or so before racing indoors.

The Rev. Needham had sunk into the nearest chair, and sat there rocking, with just perceptible nervousness, clearing his throat from time to time in a manner which appeared to afford that portion of his anatomy no appreciable relief. It seemed a kind of moral clearing. It was the vague articulation of incertitude.

As a matter of fact, Marjory had forgotten all about her brother-in-law. She was musing. At length a more desperate laryngeal disturbance than any that had preceded brought her back to contemporary consciousness.

"Ho!" she cried. "I didn't know you were there, Alfred!" There were times when he thought her almost coarse.

"I thought I'd just come out here a few minutes," he said "It's quite cool on this side, till the sun gets round." The minister sighed. He had an uncomfortable inner feeling that he hadn't quite justified his presence. It was, to be sure, his own porch; but that did not make any difference. Dimly he hoped his relation would not relinquish her position on the second step.

Marjory dipped her pen again, but the letter was doomed. With a gesture of languid, smiling despair the task was conclusively abandoned.

"No, it's no use," she muttered, rather unintelligibly. "I never can concentrate at a resort."

"Beg pardon, Marjory?"

"I just want to dream and dream all day. Isn't it dreadfully delightful?"

"Yes—we like it up here," he replied, the least bit stiffly.

"Alfred, how did you ever happen to come so far?"

"So far?"

"Yes; aren't there any resorts in Ohio?"

"Well, you see it was, to begin with, on account of the Summer Assembly. . . ."

She didn't fully fathom it until he had explained: "We're a sort of religious colony here on the Point."

"Oh-h-h!" cried the lady then, with the air of one

who is vastly—perhaps a little satirically—enlightened. I understand now what Anna meant yesterday when she spoke about 'visiting clergymen.' You hold meetings, I presume, and then have some refreshments at the end?"

"No refreshments," he replied, in a rather dry tone, reproving her at the same time, with an almost sharp glance.

"Well," she agreed, with a touch of apology, "I suppose you wouldn't. I was thinking of some of our Tahulamaji pow-wows."

To this he made no reply; but the somewhat chill dignity of the silence which ensued provoked, alas, an even more unfortunate question.

"Alfred, I know you'll consider me perfectly awfully impossible, but it's been such a long time. . . . I've forgotten—I really have. . . . It—it isn't Methodist, is it . . . ?"

"Methodist, Marjory?"

"What I mean is, you're not. . . . Oh, Alfred, for *heaven's* sake before I simply explode with chagrin, do quickly tell me *what you are!*"

"My denomination?" he asked unhappily.

"That's the word! Do please forgive a poor creature who's lived so long in out-of-the-way places that she's half forgotten how to be civilized!"

"There are certain things," the Rev. Needham told himself icily, "one never quite forgets, unless one. . . ." He started a little, raised his eyes wanly to hers, but shifted them quickly to the

landscape. "I am a Congregational minister, Marjory," he said.

"Oh, dear me! Of course! I'm sure I remembered subconsciously. Don't you think such a thing is possible?"

"You mean . . . ?" He seemed unable fully to concentrate, either—though not primarily because this was a resort.

"I mean remembering subconsciously. But you see it's all because in Tahulamaji we get so fearfully lax about everything."

Was this his cue? He fidgeted, glanced sidewise to see whether his wife were within range of his voice.

"I presume there's a great deal of laxness in Tahulamaji. . . ."

"Well," she pondered, accepting his wider implication. "Yes, I'm afraid so. Still, of course, one must never lose sight of the missionaries."

"Yes!" brightened her brother-in-law. "We help support a missionary in Tahulamaji. Perhaps you—"

"No, Alfred, no. I'm afraid I've never had that pleasure. You see I've been so busy, and the missionary seems always so busy, too."

"There's much to be done," he reminded her simply.

She was quite serious and respectful. He began to grow more at ease; more expansive; told her a great deal about what missionaries do in foreign

lands, and especially what the missionary in Tahulamaji was doing. His talk grew really interesting. Then there was a shift which brought them round to the activities of the church in America.

"We're trying to broaden out all we can," he told her. "Every year new opportunities seem to be opening up. We have to keep abreast of the times. For instance, there's the parish house—"

Leslie's arrival interrupted them. He was now dressed in white and wore a purple tie. Hilda came skipping across the porch and ran down the steps to him.

"You must wish us luck!" she called back over her shoulder.

"Just bushels of it!" Miss Whitcom called loudly after them.

Mrs. Needham had come to the door of the cottage. She stood surveying the situation so laboriously contrived. Having Marjory out there on the second step and her husband above in the rocker, with a wall of netting between them, did not somehow seem very auspicious. But she sighed and quickly withdrew; it was better than no situation at all. She thought of a text her husband had used once: "Be ye content with what the Lord giveth"—or something to that effect.

The Rev. Needham cleared his throat, again privately a little nervous. For no reason at all there had seemed to him a godless twang to her gracious, full-voiced "just bushels of it!"

Miss Whitcom recovered the threads for him.

"Yes, yes, Alfred. Quite so. You were saying something about a parish house."

"We hope to build one, in the spring . . . if we can," he went on. "The money's partly raised. Of course it takes a long time—money doesn't seem very plentiful just now. But the parish house, when we get it"—his eyes lighted softly—"will add so much to our practical facilities."

She noted this softness, and it touched her a little. All the same she had some not very soothing things to say.

"Yes, I've no doubt. I'm quite amazed—I may say almost frightened, Alfred—at the development of the common-sense idea in America. You notice it especially, I suppose, coming in like this from a long absence. The change, I may say, quite smites one. It's baffling—it's bewildering! Good gracious, all the old, moony Victorianism gone! The whole ecclesiastical life of the community made over into something so dashing and up-to-date that I tell you frankly, Alfred, I'd be almost afraid to go into a church, for fear I might no longer know how to behave! It's amazing, Alfred—it really is—how 'practical' religion has grown. I tell you I never would have dreamed the church had such a future! I come back from my long sojourn in heathendom, and what do I find? I find religion all slicked up on to a strict business basis. At last the church of God has reached an appreciation of the value and importance of money! Everywhere you read of mammoth cam-

paigns to raise millions of dollars. You have to have a real business head on your shoulders nowadays—don't you find it so, Alfred?—to be a minister. It's wonderful simply beyond belief! If Christ were to walk in suddenly I know he would have to show his card at the door. I *know* they would ask him what he came about and how long the interview would take. Practical Christianity, you call it, don't you, Alfred?"

"Marjory, I. . . ."

"Ah—now I've shocked you! Yes, I see I have. You mustn't mind my speaking out so bluntly. It's a way I've rather fallen into of late, I'm afraid. And when I say the new Christianity seems baffling to me, I mean it's quite splendidly baffling. Practical Christianity—what a fine idea it was! I wonder who thought of it. Yes, the church was always too exclusive. There can be no doubt of it. Practical Christianity—practical philanthropy—with the elaborate social service bureaus—they've just simply transformed everything. What a hustle and bustle—and what undreamed-of efficiency! Just *think* how efficiently the church stood back of the war! And yet—you must pardon me—I somehow can't help feeling that even with all its slogans and its hail-fellow slaps across your shoulders. . . . You know"—she interrupted herself, in a way, but it was to pursue the same trend of thought—"I had quite an adventure on the train, coming from New York. I watched a Bishop retire! Oh, don't look so scandalized, Alfred. Of course it was quite all right."

"I hope so, Marjory," he murmured limply.

"I must tell you about the Bishop, Alfred. He was just the kind of man you would expect a Protestant bishop to be—his face, I mean. Calm—so very calm—and so gently yet firmly ecclesiastic! He wore an unobtrusive but stylish clerical costume of soft grey, and a little gold cross hung round his neck—you know. It struck me as never before how close the Episcopacy is snuggling up to Rome. . . . Oh, but I must tell you about the Bishop's going to bed!"

The Rev. Needham sat there almost breathless on his screened porch. His dismay might have struck one as speechless—at any rate, he was speechless.

"The Bishop," continued Miss Whitcom, "seemed very weary. There was a quiet, tired look in his eyes. He had his dinner early, sitting all alone at one of the little tables on the shady side. I ate my dinner at another of the little tables, and was quite fascinated. There was something so patrician about him. He was so subtly sleek! I didn't see him again until his berth was made up. But the making up, Alfred, was what fascinated me more than the Bishop himself! The porter was just fitting things together when I came in from my simple dinner. He spread down one mattress, and then—Alfred, I gasped to see it—he spread down another right on top of it!"

"Another, Marjory?" The minister appeared quite absorbed, almost fascinated.

"Had he taken the whole section?" she demanded.

To this no reply was ventured, and she continued:

"Or did he get them both as a kind of divine dispensation? Anyway, the bed, I must say, looked almost royal. There were four pillows instead of two, and they were given little special pats and caresses. All of a sudden I thought of Jacob's stone, Alfred. Wasn't it funny? I couldn't help it. And then I thought about 'the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head'—wasn't it curious? And then, only *then*, Alfred (you see how slow I am), it occurred to me that this must be a part of the new order of things! It came to me almost like an inspiration that the bed of the Bishop must have something to do with Practical Christianity. But I'm forgetting the last appealing touch, Alfred. The Bishop had a huge bag of golf sticks with him. *They reposed all night in the upper berth!*"

She ended her rather long story about the Bishop; and its precise interpretation remained a thing of doubt for the minister. Was she serious? Or was she only laughing? His bearing now argued a preparedness for either mood. But whatever her motive, in a moment Miss Whitcom appeared to have forgotten all about the Bishop and to be busy with other matters. The Rev. Needham sat on his own side of the netting and didn't know just what he ought to do or say. What *was* to be done, what said? Fortunately, at this vaguely uncomfortable juncture,

there came another, and this time a really important, interruption.

Steps were heard on the sparse planking which served for sidewalk between Beachcrest and the road to Crystalia.

The minister, rising quickly, began rubbing his hands together. "It must be Mr. Barry," he said.

Mrs. Needham appeared at the cottage door, as though bidden by some psychic intelligence. "Are they here?" she asked excitedly.

"I can't see yet, for the shrubbery. But I think I hear Louise's voice."

"I *see* her," Miss Whitcom advised them from her position on the steps. "And what's more," she added, while her sister hastily patted and preened herself, "I see him also!"

"Mr. Barry?"

"Um. Rather tall. Not exactly bad looking. . . . But," she added darkly, "they're walking ever so far apart!"

What did she mean by that? The Rev. Needham glanced a little nervously at his wife and unconsciously began humming the Invocation.

They arrived. Lynndal was presented to Mrs. Needham, then to Miss Whitcom. He was, of course, very warmly greeted by the minister.

Louise looked troubled. . . .

The Dutch clock in the cottage living room set up a spiteful striking: one, two, three, four (each stroke tart and inimical), five, six, seven, eight (as

though from the very depths of its mecnanism it would cry out against the terrific irony of life), nine, ten. . . .

Lynndal had come all the way from Arizona.

3

"MY gracious!" cried Miss Whitcom loudly and cordially, "*I've* been in Arizona!"

"You have?"

"R*ather!* I started a cactus candy business there before you were. . . ." She paused, then wholeheartedly laughed a defiance at the very notion of grey hairs. "No, I won't say it. I won't go back so far as that. For I do believe you're thirty, sir, if you're a day."

"I'm thirty-three," confessed Barry, looking older, for just a wistful moment, than his wont.

"Well, then, when you were a youngster, we'll say, Marjory Whitcom was working fourteen long hours a day in an absurd little factory on the fringe of the desert—slaving like all possessed to make a go of it. The idea was a good one."

"Yes," he agreed, "for we're turning out wonderful cactus candy now."

"I know it. The idea was corking. Alas, so many of my ideas have been corking! But every one at that time said it was absurd to think of making candy out of cactus, and no one would believe the Toltec legend which gave us our receipt. Ah, yes—there's many a slip. . . ."

In her almost brazen way she cornered the new hero of Point Betsey—actually got between him and the others. But Miss Whitcom was shrewder, even, than she was brazen. You couldn't possibly deceive her when she had her reliable antennæ out. Had she not seen the landscape between them? Distinctly *seen* it? Suspecting the imminence of a rather taut situation, this was her way of clearing the air.

Louise did not altogether fathom her aunt's subtlety; but she was grateful, seizing the occasion to disappear. She flew up to her room, flung herself on the bed, and nervously cried a little.

Lynndal was here. The long anticipated event had actually come to pass. But it wasn't the kind of event she had conceived. What was the trouble? Was he not as she remembered him? Yes, but with phantoms to dictate the pattern, how she had idealized him in the interim, and how the correspondence had served to build up in her mind a being of romance and fire which flesh and blood could never hope to challenge! Well, he had come, this stranger—with his quiet kindliness, his somehow sensed aura of patience, where she looked for passion.

Ghosts of the past played havoc with her heart, and she thought: "Can I give myself to this man? Can I be his, all his? Can I be his for ever and ever? Can I belong henceforth to him and no one else?"

The mood was one of general relaxation, however —though a relaxation she had, at an early hour, been far enough from anticipating. She reviewed the

events of the day thus far. She had waked at flush of dawn; had risen full of a gay expectation, and had gone out to meet her lover. He had come; she had met him and had forestalled his kiss. Now he was here. Ten o'clock. And her heart was in a curious state of panic.

But Barry, meanwhile, still down on the screened porch, was finding his fiancée's relative an intelligent and really engaging person. For her part, it had not taken long—with the cactus candy as bait—to lure him into enthusiasm over his dry-farming. She knew, it developed, very nearly as much about dry-farming as he did, and Barry, of course, knew nearly as much about it as there was to know.

The Rev. and Mrs. Needham, having gone on into the cottage living room, expecting that Barry, momentarily arrested, would follow, stood a moment conferring in discreet tones.

"What do you think of him, Anna?"

"He seems like a real nice sort, Alf. What do *you* think?"

"I've always admired Barry," he said proudly, a bit complaisantly. "During several years of business connection. . . ."

"Yes, Alf he's certainly looked after our interests out West."

Sly little wrinkles of worry just etched themselves across the Rev. Needham's florid brow. Those interests in the West—heaven knew how much they meant! They kept the wolf from the door—a mild

wolf, of course, and one that wouldn't really bite; but still a wolf. Yes, they sustained the Needham establishment in a kind of grand way—certainly in a way which wouldn't be possible on ministerial salary alone. And it was Lynndal Barry's initiative which had built the dam: the dam generated electricity and paid dividends. Yes, they certainly owed a great deal—though of course it was all on a sufficiently regular business basis—to Mr. Barry.

"He's a fine, fine man—one of God's own noblemen, Anna. It's only to be hoped. . . ."

"Hoped, Alf?" Anna was seldom able to supply, off-hand, what one groped for in one's perplexity.

"That Louise," he began a little impatiently, "—that Louise. . . ."

"Why, where *is* she?" asked Mrs. Needham, looking suddenly around.

Ah, where indeed?

The Rev. Needham experienced an uncomfortable shivery sensation in his stomach. Still, there was no reason other than what Marjory had said about their walking rather far apart. What did she mean? What did she ever mean? Ah, Marjory. . . .

They looked at her. Yes, she had certainly captured Mr. Barry. Poor Marjory had a way. . , .

"I wonder," sighed the Rev. Needham—a little ponderously to conceal an inner breathlessness. "I wonder. . . ."

"What, Alf?"

He shook himself, looking dimly horrified. "Noth-

ing, Anna." What he wondered was whether his wife's sister had ever fallen by the wayside. . . .

"Alf," whispered Anna, on the point of slipping upstairs to make sure for the last time that the visitor's room was quite ready, "how did you two get on?"

"I can't say very well," he answered with an inflection of nervous vagueness. "It was almost all about a Bishop on the train. Anna, I'm—I'm afraid it's no use. You know there are people in the world that seem destined never to understand each other. . . ."

"Oh, Alf—she's so good-hearted!"

"That may be true," he replied, "but in Tahulamaji I'm beginning to be convinced she led—that she may almost have led. . . .

"Oh, Alf!"

"And she'd forgotten. . . ."

"What?"

He spoke with troubled petulance: "My denomination!"

When Miss Whitcom learned, as she did directly, that Mr. O'Donnell was at the Elmbrook Inn, down at Crystalia, she emphatically changed colour. However much she might like to deny it, a fact was a fact. And in addition to that, her talk, for at least ten seconds, was utterly incoherent. She simply mixed the words all up, and nothing she said made any sense at all. Of course she quickly regained her equilibrium and made a playful remark about "having had all that letterwriting trouble for nothing." But it must

very plainly and unequivocally be set down that throughout those first ten seconds her colour was high, her coherence at zero.

The ensuing hour at Beachcrest passed quietly, despite the fact that every one seemed moving at a high rate of tension.

Mrs. Needham spent a considerable portion of the time in conference with Eliza. The advent of the grocer's boy occasioned the usual excitement. It must be understood that these arrivals mean ever so much more in the wilderness than they do in town. In town, supposing there is a certain item missing, you merely step to the phone and give your tradesman polite hell. But on Point Betsey there were no such resources possible. They did not even have electric lights, and it was merely possible, when things went wrong, to explode to the boy (which never did any good), or to explode in a grander yet still quite as futile way to the world at large. Fortunately, this morning (the morning of this most momentous day!) the supplies arrived in relatively excellent condition.

The Rev. Needham, pacing up and down alone in the living room, paused nervously now and then to heed the muffled sounds issuing from sundry quarters of the cottage: the squeaky opening or closing of doors, which might somehow have a meaning in his life; the shuffle of steps (maybe portentous) across the sanded boards. . . . And most especially he pricked his ears—those small, alert ears of his, that were perpetually prepared for the worst—when the

things came from the store. It would be horrible, with guests in the house, to have a short supply; although of course here again, as in the case of the pancakes, he was concerning himself outside his own department. But even if these responsibilities of the kitchen didn't really rest on his shoulders, nevertheless the Rev. Needham listened as each item was pronounced, upon its emergence from the huge market basket.

Coffee, cheese, eggs—eggs, ah! we must look at them. One broken? Well, we should be thankful for eleven sound ones. Housekeeping, especially housekeeping in a cottage, develops a wonderful and luminous patience. This patience—like mercy, an attribute of God Himself—may even sometimes lead one to the tracing of quite Biblical applications. There were twelve disciples in the beginning, yet one of them, in the stress of events. . . .

Bread, celery, carrots, frosted cookies. *Where was the roast?* The Rev. Needham's heart stood still. He halted, petrified with horrid fear. The roast, the roast! Thank God they found it, down at the bottom of the basket. Oh, thank *God!* The pacing was resumed.

Up and down, up and down. One would have perceived here, so far as externals went, merely a quiet, middle-aged clergyman strolling in his home. Yet in the cottage living room this clergyman and this angry Dutch clock together synthesized contemporary events. "Trouble, trouble, trouble, trouble!" ticked

the clock sharply. And each step in the Rev. Needham's pacing seemed a question. As the years crept by, broadening vision seemed not very materially to be quieting the good man's fidgets and perturbations. It seemed merely to give them longer tether; for his unsettled state was organic. It would never be really otherwise. Religion, science, feeling, thought, reason—all alike, in their several directions, seemed impotent to anchor him. The sea was too deep. He might, of course, *call* himself anchored; but alas, the cruel little demons of doubt and quandary were bound, sooner or later, to insinuate themselves back into his heart. His walk was groping, indecisive. Each step was a question: "Whither? Why? How long? What is best? What is best? *What is best?*"

Miss Whitcom stood meditatively before the somewhat wavy mirror in her little room. She was pondering past, present, future. Also, she was acknowledging that grey hairs had perceptibly multiplied since O'Donnell last saw her. Would he notice them? And if he did? Well? She contemplated herself and her life in the wavy mirror.

Beyond his own three-quarters partition, Barry happened at the same moment to be standing before a mirror also—as men do sometimes, who would be sure to deny the charge were it publicly preferred against them. Yes, he was getting along. Not in

any sense *old*, of course. To some a man of thirty-three seems still a young man. He tried to look at it that way. Still thirty-three was thirty-three. And Louise. . . . She was young, so young—and fresh, and sweet, and adorable. . . . His quiet eyes misted a moment as he thought of her. And for her sake he could wish himself one of those fabulous princes we read of in childhood. Ah, yes—a kind of prince—just for her sake! He regarded himself in the glass solemnly and critically. There were undeniable lines of salient maturity in his face; and princes, that was sure, never had any lines at all. So young, so sweet, so charming! He sighed and went about unpacking his things. That he should win her—that he should win this dear girl for his wife. . . . !

"I have done nothing to deserve such happiness as this," he said softly. "In all my life, nothing, nothing!"

And then he took a ring out of a little box and gazed at it. And when he had gazed at it a long time, he put it back in the box and put the box in his pocket.

Louise, in the seclusion of her room, no longer wept, though she still lay on the bed. Tears had relieved the strain, and her heart was not so burdened. Slowly reviving, she lay in a sort of half pleasant lethargy—not thinking, exactly, nor even actually feeling, for the moment. Tears are like suave drugs: under their mystic persuasion life may assume the

lovely softness of a mirage. But the softness is fleeting. It rests and it is gone. It is like false dawn. Or it is like a dream of light when the night is blackest.

4

MARJORY and Anna met outside the cottage in a little rustic bower where there was a hammock, and where the Rev. Needham had constructed, with his own hands, a clumsy and rather unstable rustic bench. It had taken him nearly all one summer to build this bench. The clergyman had perspired a great deal, and gone about with a dogged look. They were all mightily relieved when the task was at last completed. It seemed to simplify life.

Mrs. Needham sat on the rustic bench now, fanning herself with her white apron. Her face was flushed, her manner a little wild. She and Eliza had reached the agonizing conclusion that the raisins, indispensable to the Indian meal pudding, hadn't come, only to discover the little package lying out on the path where it had slipped from the grocer boy's basket. The pudding was saved, but what a shock to one's whole system!

"Well, Anna," said her sister, dropping fearlessly into the hammock. None but newcomers possessed that sublime faith in hammock ropes!

"I declare!" returned Anna. "Whew!"—her apron moving rapidly—"So warm!"

"Well, have you been charging up hillsides, or racing Alfred on the beach?"

Mrs. Needham looked a little startled at the irreverent allusion. "Oh, no, only planning with Eliza, and—"

"You find Eliza a treasure, don't you?"

"Yes, she's very capable."

"I suppose a maid's capability must take on a special lustre in the wilderness. Don't you sometimes fancy you see a faint halo over Eliza's head? You people in this luxurious country have become so dependent, I don't know what you *would* do if there should ever be a general strike!"

"No, I don't know either," admitted Mrs. Needham. "Eliza talks of going back. It's so quiet up here—girls don't like it. We've raised her twice. I really don't know what's going to be the end of the help question. And wages . . . !" She raised her eyes to the heavens.

A short silence followed. Marjory swung gently back and forth in the hammock. She might have been pronounced an eloquent embodiment of perfect calm; and yet her heart was curiously bumping about.

"Anna," she asked slowly, "do you remember Barrett O'Donnell?"

Her sister looked at her queerly a moment. "Some friend, Marjory?" For Marjory had had, in her time, so many friends!

"You'll remember him, I know, when you see

him," she nodded. And then she continued: "He's here."

"Here?"

"Well," her sister laughed, "not quite on the Point, but at Crystalia."

"Really?"

"Dear old Barrett! I wonder. . . ."

"Marjory," the other asked, with an odd effect of conscious shrewdness, "is he—is Mr. O'Donnell *the* man?"

"For goodness sake, *what* man, Anna?"

"Why, I always felt," her sister replied quaintly, "that there was one man, all through the years—'way from the time we stopped telling each other secrets. . . ."

Marjory laughed loudly. But she seemed touched also. "It's a long time, isn't it, since we stopped telling secrets?"

And Anna sighed, for perhaps her retrospect, if less exciting, was even longer than her sister's.

The two sat, after that, a little while without speaking. Then Anna's large round face assumed a truly brilliant expression.

"Marjory!" she cried.

"Well?"

"You say he's here?"

"Um, though it seems impossible to credit such a thing. Perhaps it's all a myth. He's at the Elmbrook Inn. Is there," she whimsically faltered, "—is there honestly such a place?"

"Marjie, I mean to have him up!"

"Anna—you mean here?"

"For *luncheon!*"

In their excitement the two ladies were really all but shouting at each other. They realized it and smiled; sank to quieter attitudes both of bearing and speech.

"You think he'd come, don't you Marjie?"

"Come? R*ather!* Did you ever hear of a travelling man turning down a chance at home cooking?"

"Then I'm going to send right over and invite him. It will be real fun! I suppose," she embroidered, with as great an effect of roguery as she could enlist, "I suppose he's followed you up!"

"Obviously!" her sister replied, not apparently flustered in the least.

"Think of it!"

"Yes, it is rather dreadful, isn't it—especially at our ages!"

"I think it's kind of splendid, Marjie."

"Er—Alfred never was much of what you'd call the 'following' kind, was he Anna?"

"Well, I can't seem to remember. It seems to me once. . . ."

"Oh, they'll nearly always follow *once*. It's keeping right on that seems hard. Of course," she added, "marriage puts a stop to all that sort of thing, doesn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose, in a sense. . . ."

"Anna, there's just one way to keep 'em going:

don't marry! Well, you see for yourself how it is."

"Yes, but it seems kind of dreadful to put it that way, don't it?"

"Dreadful? Oh, yes. Yes, of course it's dreadful. Still, it's rather nice."

"M-m-m," murmured Anna.

The philosophy of man's pursuit proved baffling. Here were two sisters who knew its bitters and its sweets. Yet it is doubtful if for either the bitter was all bitter and the sweet all sweet. . . .

Hilda and Leslie came back from the tennis tournament. They were hot and in high spirits.

"Who won?" asked Mrs. Needham cheerily.

"We did, mama!"

"Three cheers!" cried Miss Whitcom, sitting up enthusiastically in the hammock.

"You never saw such excitement!" cried Hilda. "Most of the games were deuce for both sides before anybody got it!"

"Very close," was Leslie's simpler version.

Louise crept to her window and peered down into the bower. Hilda and Leslie were holding one racquet between them. It was his racquet and she was twining her fingers playfully in and out among the strings. A feeling of suffocation closed suddenly upon Louise's throat.

And just then Barry walked into the bower. He had been exploring the delightful wild endroit, and

hoping that Louise might suddenly appear, with some lovely tangle of wood and vine for background. For he hailed from a country where trees are scarce, and one's backgrounds from childhood are sand, desert sand. His life had grown suddenly so rich. . . .

Barry was welcomed. Mrs. Needham made room for him beside her on the rustic bench. She looked at him a little shyly, but with the ecstatic admiration, also, of one who would say: "This is the man we're giving our daughter to!"

But where *was* Louise? Her mother had scarcely seen her since the return from Frankfort. How strangely she was behaving.

"I believe she's lying down," said Barry, his tone warm with shielding tenderness and apology. "She got up so early to meet the boat. It was wonderful of her!"

The two young champions were giving Aunt Marjie a fuller account of the tennis combat. They still held the racquet between them. Both were flushed, keen-eyed, ridiculously happy. How soon he had recovered! Louise, up at her window, remembered Leslie's mood at an earlier hour. At dawn she might have had him. Now it was too late. "Oh, the injustice of it!" she cried, her hands crushing her breast. But as she looked down into his glowing face, she realized a swift sense of humiliation. "He didn't care after all," she told herself.

Hilda and Leslie evinced great willingness to convey the luncheon invitation to Barrett O'Donnell. Leslie, of course, volunteered to go, and Hilda, of course, said she simply *would* go too. So off they raced, still holding the tennis racquet between them.

Louise watched them go. In her hand was the book she had bought in Frankfort. Suddenly, under stress of very violent emotion, she pressed it against her cheek.

Barry watched them out of sight. He was thinking of Louise. She had not yet kissed him. In his pocket was a little box, and inside the little box was a ring.

Marjory also watched them go. She sighed even as she smiled: "Another young thing, just starting out—boy-crazy. So futile." But she smiled more radiantly in spite of herself, and the other valuation *would* slip in: "So sweet!"

5

THE portières between the dining room and the living room at Beachcrest are carefully drawn. The whole company is assembled, waiting. It is one o'clock, the vitriolic Dutch timepiece on the mantel having just snapped out the hungry truth.

The clock, with its quenchless petulance and spite, is lord of the mantel. And what an entourage of vassels! Close up against it huddles a bottle of peroxide. Then, although disposed in some semblance of neatness and order, one discovers a fish stringer, an old pipe, several empty cigar boxes, heaps of old letters, a book opened and turned down, a number of rumpled handkerchiefs, some camera films, a bottle of red ink. There are two odd candlesticks, without any candles, a metal dish containing a vast miscellany of pins, collar buttons, rubber bands, and who knows what? Lo, on the other side of the clock loiter a curious pebble, a laundry list, a box of candy, some loose change and a little paper money, a pocket flash which no longer works, matches in a broken crockery receiver, perfumes, sandpaper, a writing tablet and some yellowing envelopes. And one glimpses, emerging from chaos, the frayed handle of a whisk broom which has seen immeasur-

ably better days. Some woven grass baskets, too. Anything else? Yes, yonder is a box of tacks, and beside it a little pile of the Rev. Needham's socks, nicely darned. Also, strewn here and there, are various rail and steamship timetables, most of which bear the dates of seasons long gone by. An immortal miscellany! Oh, and one must not miss that curious creature squatting in a dim corner and peering ever alertly around with his little beady eyes: yes, a sad and much dilapidated Teddy Bear.

One o'clock!

There is a tendency on the part of every pair of eyes—even those of the Rev. Needham, or perhaps especially those—to direct from time to time a wholly unconscious glance of hope mingled with mild anxiety toward the tantalizing green portières, beyond which Eliza moves about with maddening deliberateness.

One o'clock, snapping like a dry forest twig under the tread of some wild creature. Then an angry *tick*-tock, *tick*-tock. On and on and on, forever.

Out in the kitchen Eliza was prodding the kettle of soup. She was dreamily thinking of the porter at the hotel in Beulah. Would he get over this evening? Oh, love is so wonderful! Eliza was quite gauche and unlettered; yet love, for her, was a thing which could rouse brilliant orgies of the imagination. Love, even for her, was something which transcended all the ineffable promised glories of Heaven itself. Yes, it was better than the streets of pearl and the

gates of amethyst—or was it the gates of pearl and the streets of gold?

When the soup was ready she served it, then thrust asunder the portières. "Lunch is served, ma'am," she announced, with a degree of majesty which would simply have terrorized the Beulah porter.

They responded promptly—not exactly crowding ahead of each other, but stepping along with irreproachable briskness. Appetites beside the sea are like munition factories in wartime.

There was a cheerful rattle of chairs and much scraping of feet under the table. Then a solemn silence, while the minister prayed. The Rev. Needham, of course, sat at the head of the table. Mrs. Needham sat opposite him at the foot. To the minister's right was Miss Whitcom, who found herself delightfully sandwiched in between a knight of the church and a knight of the grip. Needless to say, the latter was Mr. O'Donnell, looking his very nicest and smelling of soap like the Brushwood Boy. Next came Hilda, who flashed quite dazzling smiles across at her sister, smiles more subdued and shy at Mr. Barry. There was a flurry of conversation at first, while the paper napkins were being opened up and disposed where they would afford the most protection —not a great deal, it is to be feared, at best. And then—well, then there was almost no talk at all until after the soup. As they say in theatre programs: "The curtain will be lowered one minute to denote a lapse of time."

Miss Whitcom and Mr. O'Donnell had employed quite as little formality in their meeting as the latter had prophesied during the trip up to Beulah. She hadn't, as a matter of fact, referred to the wall paper in the throne room of the Queen's palace. Instead she had remarked: "You know, it's curious. I was just dropping you a note. Yes. I wanted, for one thing, to express my regret over the unlikelihood of our seeing each other this trip, since you see I'm going right back. Jolly you should have happened along like this—and a postage stamp saved into the bargain!" While he, swallowing his disappointment over the prospect of her immediate return to Tahulamaji, had replied in like spirit: "How fortunate—about the stamp, I mean. It *has* been a long while, hasn't it?"

And now they were sitting side by side at the table, rather monopolizing the conversation—having a beautiful time, yet never quite descending from that characteristic, mutually assumed tone of banter.

"I suppose you're still travelling, Mr. O'Donnell?"

"Still travelling, Miss Whitcom."

"Same firm?"

"Same firm."

It had been the same firm almost as far back as memory went. It always would be the same firm. There was little of change and perhaps nothing at all of adventure in this destiny. But there was a rather substantial balance in the bank, which, after all, is a kind of adventure, too.

"Babbit & Babbit," she mused.

"Members of the O. A. of C."

"True. I'm afraid I'd forgotten the letters at the end."

He nibbled at his celery. "And you, Miss Whitcom?"

"Still mostly travelling, Mr. O'Donnell."

"Same firm?"

"Oh, dear no! There the interesting parallel must cease. One has to be progressive, you know. One must keep abreast of the times." She gave her brother-in-law a dreadful, broad wink. "What was I doing last?"

O'Donnell grinned. "I believe—wasn't it piloting tourists through Europe?"

"Do you mean to tell me it's been as long as that since I've seen you?"

"As I recollect it—something of the sort."

"Yes, yes. So it was. But that was before the war. You knew, of course, that I'd gone to Tahulamaji."

"You answered several of my letters," he reminded her sweetly.

"Ah, of course I did. And you should have felt highly flattered, for I may say I made no point of keeping up any sort of correspondence at all down there."

"I should say not!" put in Mrs. Needham, laughing.

"Oh, yes. I was flattered—flattered even if they

were only postcards. But I haven't yet got it straight what you were doing in Tahulamaji. Was it the same sort of thing there?"

"What! Piloting tourists?" She had a hearty laugh. Her brother-in-law started a little. One of Marjory's hearty laughs was always like an unexpected slap on the back.

"You mean there aren't any sights to show?" asked O'Donnell meekly. "I don't even know where Tahulamaji is, and I haven't the faintest idea what it's like."

"Oh," she laughed, "there are plenty of sights. It's ever so much better than Europe!"

"Then why *not* pilot?"

"There aren't any tourists."

"Not any at all?"

"None, at least, who require piloting. You see, we haven't been sufficiently exploited yet. For some reason we've escaped so far, though I expect any day to hear that we've been discovered. Those who come are bent on plain, stern business. Most of them get away again the next day. Those who don't get off the next day, or at most the day after that, you may depend upon it have come to stay—like me."

"So you are quite determined to go back again."

"Quite. Why not?"

They gazed quietly at each other a moment, while the minister began dispensing dried-beef-in-cream-on toast—a special Beachcrest dish; French-fried potatoes. Mrs. Needham watched with quaking heart

until it was patent there would be enough to go round. Then she began pouring the tea.

There was always, at any rate, plenty of tea. But Miss Whitcom nearly occasioned a panic by asking for lemon. The rest took cream, if for no better reason than that it was right there on the table. The demand had been, like everything Miss Whitcom did, unpremeditated, and was immediately withdrawn. She tossed her head and laughed. Wasn't it absurd to ask for lemon in the wilderness? But Anna Needham rose to the occasion. It was a crisis.

She tinkled the bell in a breathless yet resolute way; she so wanted to impress her sister as being a competent housekeeper. It amounted almost to a passion. Perhaps living so long with Alfred had rather tended to weaken belief in her own abilities.

Eliza was gone a good while. But she triumphantly returned with the lemon. Mr. O'Donnell looked at Miss Whitcom's tea a little wistfully. He had already taken cream. Possibly he preferred lemon too. But it requires real genius to ask for what one doesn't see before one in this law-of-least-resistance world.

This slight tension removed, the Rev. Needham resumed a quiet conversation with Barry about the affairs in the West. Everything, it seemed, was going finely. It began to look as though they might all grow positively rich off the desert! And it was owing to Barry—entirely to him. Well, Barry was a fine young man—so *completely* satisfactory. If the Need-

hams had had a son, Alfred would have wished him to be like Barry. Sure, patient, untiring, generous—generous to a fault, yet with such solid faculties for business! And now, here he was, about to step right into the family. It was too good to be true. Yes, much too good. The Rev. Needham swelled with pride and beamed with affection. He beamed on Barry, and never noted how his daughter sat there beside this paragon, eating little, talking almost not at all....

Hilda was another member of the party who talked little. Her deportment, however, was quite different. Her cheeks were highly coloured, and her eyes sparkled. Aunt Marjie, who seemed somehow never too engrossed in anything to give good heed to everything else, looked curiously from Hilda to Louise, to Barry, from Barry on to her brother-in-law. Then she looked at Hilda again, recalling Leslie, and smiled. She looked at Louise again, also, then at Barry, and her expression grew more serious. She looked at Louise a third time, still with Leslie in the back of her mind, and thought of the forgotten stove burners....

Why was it, she asked herself, that men had to make such baffling differences in women's lives?

6

AFTER luncheon the company broke up. The Rev. Needham announced, just a little stiffly (for he felt the upsetting gaze of his sister-in-law) that it was customary at Beachcrest to spend a quiet hour, at this point of the day's span, napping. He wanted to create an easy home atmosphere, and the most effective way seemed to be to impress outsiders with the fact that everything was really running along just as though none but the immediate family was present.

Miss Whitcom yawned at once. "Good gracious!" she exclaimed. "I'm *horribly* sleepy. Never would have dreamed what was the matter with me, Alfred, if you hadn't come to the rescue. I *am* grateful!"

And then—and then the Rev. Needham did a tremendous, a revolutionary, a gigantic and unforgettable thing. He simply overwhelmed himself and everybody else by making an almost low bow!

Mrs. Needham uttered a tiny gasp—she really couldn't help it. What had gotten into Alfred? Then she laughed, a little too shrilly, as by way of heralding to all the Point the glorious, glad tidings that there was, at last, a genuine, wholesome, jolly home atmosphere established.

Yes, the bow was inspired. There was no other way of looking at it. The bow was an inspired bow.

And what had come over the Rev. Needham was this: He had suddenly, in a sort of buoyant flare, determined that Marjory's manner would have to be played up to! It was simply ridiculous—scandalous—to allow himself to be disturbed and even secretly harassed by his wife's own sister. Yes, it was little short of a scandal! And now, rather tardily, it may be admitted, the Rev. Needham had attained salvation. It was simply to make a low bow. How clever—and how exquisitely subtle! He laughed aloud with the rest. His feet were squarely on the ground, after all. Of course they were. And splendidly, magnificently he defied the prickly feeling to come again into his heels!

The Rev. Needham was, in truth, privately so captivated with this curious and unforeseen twist in his fortunes that he forgot all about his own customary fatigue: forgot that this was the hour of quiet at Beachcrest—rendered so by immemorial precedent. He swaggered a little, without, of course, quite losing the ministerial poise; and spoke up, as his wife afterward phrased it, "real brisk and hearty." Cigars were passed to Barry and O'Donnell. The Rev. Needham bit into one himself. It is altogether possible he might, under the influence of this new heroic emotion, have distributed cigarettes, had there been anything so devilish on the premises.

As the box went blithely back on to the mantel, Miss

Whitcom, who was greatly enjoying what she perfectly fathomed, perceived an irresistible obligation to suggest that he had gone only half way around. The Rev. Needham looked perhaps just a shade startled. Could he bow again? And if not, how else was her manner to be played up to? Had he already struck a snag? Obviously it would be going a little too far to take her at her word and offer her a cigar.

"One wants to be sociable, you know," she said, her eyes sparkling.

"I know of a lady poet in the East who smokes cigars," volunteered O'Donnell.

He spoke quite easily, as though for Miss Whitcom's special benefit, and to convey the impression that he had quite grown accustomed or reconciled to such dainty feminine indulgence. Indeed, he looked at her with shy sprightliness.

"Oh, yes," she replied, "and, if you remember, a lady novelist started the custom."

He didn't remember, but he chuckled. And she went on: "As a matter of fact, and just amongst ourselves, why shouldn't women smoke if they want to? And why shouldn't they *want* to? Isn't it perfectly natural they should? I'm not, strictly speaking, championing the habit, for it's expensive and rather silly. But if half the human race wants to turn itself into portable smoke stacks, then by all means let the other half follow suit. So you see, Alfred, you'd really better let me have one. For you hear for yourself, Mr. O'Donnell knows of a poet who

smokes. Of course," she admitted, "I'm not a poet."

But O'Donnell was certainly in a romantic mood today. He wouldn't let her admission stand. "Yes, you are," he began, with an odd impulsiveness, adding in a quieter though quite as fervent tone: "—a kind of poet. . . ."

They eyed each other steadily a moment, as they had done once or twice before, that day. It was surely another O'Donnell than the O'Donnell of long ago—the O'Donnell, for instance, who had eased up at the finish and let her win the race. Was she, also, in a way, another Marjory? A Marjory, after all, rather less insistent upon, or who had grown just a tiny bit weary of, doing things simply to be independent —simply for the joy of doing them gloriously and daringly alone?

When the gentlemen had repaired to the porch to smoke and to discuss, as is the custom at such times, matters too deep to be grasped by the feminine intellect, Miss Whitcom succeeded in confronting Louise.

"Now," she said, with a warm, inviting firmness which brought a flash of tears to the girl's eyes.

She laid an arm around Louise's shoulders, and they stood thus together a few moments in the middle of the cottage living room. Could the Rev. Needham have looked in upon this affecting picture, and could those small eager ears of his have partaken of

the subsequent talk which passed between them, the cigar of confidence and authority would have dropped from his fingers, its brave spark dimmed forever. Yes, he would have forgotten completely the brilliant bow which had seemed to smooth away all of life's snarls by giving him, marvellously, in an instant, a positive, almost Nietzschean philosophy. But for the present he was safe.

"How could things have gone so far without your realizing?"

"I don't know."

"But you must know how you feel toward him!" Louise shook her head miserably. "I thought I cared. . . . Perhaps I still do."

"But aren't you sure?"

"I—I don't believe I know. I don't seem sure of anything."

"But, my dear child—"

"I *thought* I was sure."

"And all those letters—"

"Yes, yes," cried Louise tensely. "You see it was all letters, Aunt Marjie. And when I came suddenly to see him again. . . ."

"Oh, come, child, we don't fall in love with men's hats and the twist of their profiles. You must still love whatever it was you loved all those long months you were apart. Isn't it reasonable?"

"I—I. . . ." Oh, what was the use of asking her to be reasonable? What has a heart full of ghosts to do with reason? And Leslie. . . .

She felt like crying. She began looking upon herself as almost a person who has been somehow wronged. Her emotion grew thicker. She drew shyly away.

Aunt Marjie, as she let her go from her, realizing that words just now would get them nowhere, was thinking that in the midst of a universe full of souls and wheeling planets, one poor heartache was like a grain of dust. Well, perhaps she *was* a kind of poet. But in a moment the impersonal millions, both of souls and of stars, vanished away, and this girl's problem ascended to a position of tremendous importance, if not quite of majesty.

At length, after he had smoked his cigar, the Rev. Needham did retire to the couch of his wonted siesta, leaving the household, as he thought, pleasantly and profitably disposed.

Of course, the fact that the host proposed to take a nap did not mean that all the others had to follow suit. It was just part of the device for making every one feel that nothing was being upset because of "company." It did not mean that O'Donnell, for instance, would have to subject himself to the rather embarrassing alternative of curling up on the short living room sofa. Miss Whitcom and Mr. O'Donnell happly repaired to the rustic bower. Hilda skipped off singing into the woods. Mrs. Needham —well, Mrs. Needham was still in the kitchen with Eliza. The latter was stolidly eating her luncheon

of left-overs on the very table to which Louise and Leslie had sat down at dawn. Mrs. Needham stood solemnly before Eliza as she ate, her hands on her hips, her face growing flushed again, talking endlessly—about dinner. Louise and Lynndal Barry were on the porch. Lovers were so brazen, nowadays, they didn't mind at all if the partitions between their embraces and the outside world were mere mosquito gauze. The Rev. Needham, slyly recognizing this great truth, chuckled over it, in his new mood of sublime assurance, all the way upstairs. Each step cracked, and all the way up he was telling himself contentedly: "A fine young man—one of God's own noblemen!" And as gentle slumber wafted his soul into a peace which, especially on a full stomach, so often passeth understanding, he whispered dreamily: "Coming right into the family. . . ."

Thank God the Western interests were forever safeguarded!

But meanwhile, out on the porch, the situation grew from moment to moment more poignant.

Louise seemed suddenly to be sparring for time. She had decided—as well as her giddy little brain was capable, just now, of deciding anything at all—that the whole crux of the matter was her disappointment over the way Lynndal had turned out. . . . But what Aunt Marjie had said about not loving his hat and the twist of his profile anyhow had rather

upset her again. Once she almost flung herself into his arms with a great, comfortable, forgiving, beseeching, surrendering cry. What a haven his arms might seem! But something in her heart, she imagined, warned her: "You cannot yet! Dare you? Remember—it would be irrevocable!"

Time, time! There was obviously an issue to be faced. But with all the vital eloquence of desperation Louise reasoned that bitterness deferred might somehow lose a degree of its sting. Feeble logic, and logic not very profound; but she was scarcely in a frame of mind to evolve, at the present moment, any logic more substantial. Her problem was delicate, tenuous, like the sheen on the wings of a butterfly. Her tragedy was a thing of shades and of shadows—a thing wellnigh ungraspable. But it was none the less real. Oh, it was very real to her! In an orgy of the mañana spirit she abandoned herself to eventualities as they should develop. Her fate—whatever it was going to prove—would rush on and overtake her; she would not go out to meet it half way. Dared not.

"I'm afraid you'll think me not very cordial," she said desperately, "but I have a headache, Lynndal, and I'm going to ask if you'd mind if I went up to my room for a little while. . . ."

"Oh," he cried, in real and honest distress, "I'm so sorry! Why didn't you tell me before? Perhaps the smoke has been annoying you?"

"Oh, it's nothing," she answered, smiling in the

wan way common to invalids for whom the end is in sight. "These headaches come on, quite suddenly sometimes. If I lie down for an hour, it will be gone, I think."

"I'm sorry, dear," he repeated, touching her elbow as she turned to leave him. The contact emboldened him and he slipped an arm round her waist and bent over her a little as he walked with her toward the door. "You shouldn't have tried to meet me this morning, dear. It was too much."

"I wanted to," she murmured huskily.

"Will you come out again later?" he pleaded, content, under the circumstances, that she should leave him now.

Louise nodded and passed into the cottage.

"Couldn't we take a little walk on the beach later, if your head is better? Later on, when the sun isn't quite so hot?"

She turned and murmured: "Yes." There was another impulse to throw herself into his arms; she longed to go to him and cry against his heart. But at the same moment she remembered Leslie—how close he had held her in the morning, how they had kissed. . . . The impulse was stifled.

When she was gone from him, Barry sat down again on the porch to finish his cigar. It was the cigar which the Rev. Needham had given him after luncheon. It was a good cigar, for the Rev. Needham knew what was what, despite his intense holiness.

Barry was one of those rare individuals who have never really loved before. Curiously, the insatiable god Eros had passed him largely by till now. But ah—the tardy fevers! They may be more virulent than those of timelier visitation. . . . His eye swept the curve of the white beach, ablaze with the mid-day sun. Later they would be strolling there together, he and she. He would be walking out there beside this dear girl whose love had thrilled to the dull roots of his bachelordom. And then he would tell her how he adored her; would open the little box and slip the ring on her finger. . . .

It was so wonderful, after dwelling in the desert all his life!

7

SHE really did have a very little headache; though this was the least of her troubles.

There sounded a whistle outside. In the midst of her wretchedness, Louise lifted her head and listened. Low and sustained, it had saluted her ear when dawn's pink flush was in the sky; but now it seemed far more eager; it seemed to glint through the sunshine.

Springing to her window, Louise crouched there. The historical novel lay on the sill, where she had left it. Her fingers closed tensely about it, although she did not at first realize what it was she was clutching. Leslie was outside. She could see him coming on through the forest, and caught her breath in a little hysterical gasp of joy. Leslie! She couldn't let him go! She loved him! She had never, she felt, loved anybody as she loved Leslie. Oh, the injustice of it! That he must be denied her, though it was he she loved the best! But there *must* be a way. Somehow, somehow she must contrive. . . . She must contrive, whatever it might cost, to keep him. . . . But she faltered. Wasn't it too late?

His hands were in his pockets; his face was richly animated; his eyes were full of light. Leslie was

almost handsome—ah, strangely more beautiful now than when she had wanted to be his friend. His brightness dazzled her; and she looked out at him through her perplexed tears.

He had held her for a moment in his arms as they stood, so deeply enthralled, on that dappled forest road. Would he ever hold her in his arms again?

"Leslie!" she murmured.

He halted, looking quickly about.

"I'm here," she continued, in the same unhappy tone, "—up here!" They were the very words Lynndal had used when he stood above her on the deck of the steamer.

And it was plain, too painfully plain, Leslie had not been searching her window. At first he appeared a little embarrassed. An indefinite numbness closed about her heart. It seemed, all at once, as though retrospect embodied no mutual past for these two. Intimate strangers! For all at once Leslie seemed as essentially unknown and aloof from her destiny as Lynndal had seemed during that first curious, bewildering moment when his steamer was coming in. Leslie—merely a lad passing by outside, under her window. And she blushed at the thought of having dared to speak to him. . . .

"Do you know where Hilda is?" he enquired, trying to throw a great deal of carelessness into both tone and posture.

Louise miserably shook her head.

"I was to meet her," Leslie explained simply. And, smiling, he turned with abruptness and began strolling off. He could be cool enough when it pleased him.

"Leslie!" she cried out, though discreetly. For she dared not let Lynndal hear her. In volume her voice by no means matched its almost terrible intensity.

The tone arrested him. "What?" And he stopped and looked bluntly back at the window.

"Wait, Leslie, I think I know where Hilda is."

"Where?"

"Wait just a minute. I'm coming down. Will you come around to the back door?"

He nodded, too indifferent to voice the curiosity he might normally be expected to feel over her desire to emerge from the back rather than from the front door of the cottage.

As she flew, a sudden determination swayed her. Both men, she argued, were strangers again. *She must win Leslie back!*

When she stole out to him a moment later, he was loitering casually in the vicinity of a little shed where driftwood was kept. The Rev. Needham always made a point of talking about the rare quality of surf-wood blazes. The Rev. Needham had constructed this shed also with his own hands, just as he had constructed the remarkable rustic bench; only the shed had taken another summer, of course. This shed was really a Beachcrest institution; so was like-

wise the perennial lugging up of driftwood for storage therein recognized to be an almost religous adjunct of Point life. There was an informal rule—of ancient standing, playfully enough conceived, and of course playfully laid down—that no one should come in from the beach without at least one piece of driftwood. Much preferably, of course, a respectable, staggering armful. The rule *was* wholly playful; and yet, should several days pass with no contribution at all to the shed, Mrs. Needham and the girls would be troubled, and perhaps even a trifle frightened, to behold the minister himself tottering in with a colossal load. He would cast reproachful glances their way. And it would sometimes be a long while before he regained any sort of serenity. Yet it was a favourite maxim with the Rev. Needham that they came up here to the cottage for sheer relaxation and amusement.

Leslie had selected from the shed a smooth splinter, once part of a ship's spar. He had taken out his knife and was busy whittling. And he kept at this self-imposed task quite doggedly, seeming to find in it a certain sanctuary. His eyes scrupulously followed the slashings of the blade. Thus they avoided hers—for the most part without too deliberately seeming to do so. Louise was herself dimly grateful for the distraction.

"What do you think I found in Frankfort this morning?" she demanded, trying to smile with something of the old bewitchment. The historical novel

was clasped behind her. She had certainly not meant to show it to him; yet here it was.

"I give *up*," he replied, accentuating the final word with a particularly telling stroke on the spar splinter.

Then she drew the book slowly round into sight and half extended it, as though it were an offering that might effect a return, somehow, to that golden relationship which Lynndal's coming had broken off.

"A book?" He went on whittling.

"You haven't even read the title!" she cried, half pleadingly.

"Something new?"

"Why, Les. . . ."

Glancing back at the book, he merely muttered: "Oh."

"You remember you were telling me about it. I happened to see it in a window." She spoke a little hysterically, and began wishing she had not come down. "Only think—in a town like Frankfort, of all places! I was so surprised that I walked right in and bought it! I—I expect to enjoy it very much," she ended miserably.

Leslie whittled, still stubbornly taciturn. If he would ask about Lynndal—if he would only show *some* kind of emotion: anything would be better than this awful silence. Finally, since he thus forced her hand, Louise reminded him that she had previously intimated a knowledge of her sister's whereabouts.

"*Do* you know where she is?" he looked at her with a furtive flash of interest.

"I think she's gone to the tree-house."

"Alone?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Long ago?"

"No, not so very long."

Leslie began humming, and shifted restlessly.

"I think you'd find her there, Les, if you wanted to find her. But if. . . ." She left it dumbly in the air.

Still the boy hummed, his eyes never leaving the spar.

"Are you two going for a hike, or something?"

He stirred and looked up quickly at a little red squirrel chattering on a bough above them. "We're going to cut sticks for the roast tonight."

"Is there to be a roast?"

"The mid-summer Assembly Roast," he explained, a little pointedly. There seemed no reason for one's forgetting so important an event as the Assembly Roast.

"Oh, yes," she replied. "I'd forgotten all about it, for the moment. Will it be over beyond the lighthouse?"

"Yes, clear around the Point."

"Sticks, you mean, for marshmallows?" How obvious it all sounded!

"Marshmallows and wienies," he told her.

"There will have to be at least three dozen sticks, so I guess I'd better. . . ."

The little squirrel chattered brazenly on above them. A locust was shrilling somewhere across the dazzling sand. She told herself she had given him every chance.

"You mustn't let me keep you, Les."

"Oh, that's all right."

She had given him every chance. He did not care, after all. She had been deceived in him. Oh, the injustice of it all!

"I must go find Mr. Barry," she said. "He'll wonder what's become of me!" And she forced a brief little laugh. "It will be lots of fun. I'd forgotten all about the mid-summer roast! I'll—we'll see you there. . . ."

"Yes," he answered.

Their eyes suddenly met. She flushed, and her throat ached. He turned slowly away.

"Good-bye, Les."

"Good-bye," he answered.

Louise reëntered the cottage by the back door. Eliza was singing over her work at the sink. And Leslie, smiling in a kind of baffling way, strolled off, still whittling the broken spar.

And Eros skipped beside him. Eros knew well enough where the tree-house was. He didn't have to be shown, for as a matter of fact he had helped construct it, up in the crotch of a giant oak: had subsequently climbed nimbly to the tiny empire of its se-

clusion in the interest of many a summer twain. Yes, Eros knew the way quite well. However, for the sheer sake of companionship, he chose to skip along by the side of a lad who was whittling a broken spar and smiling in a kind of baffling way.

8

"THE Queen of Tahulamaji," admitted Miss Whitcom, "was really a most amazing creature."

"I should think it likely."

They were sitting together on the rustic bench. At first he had been on the rustic bench alone. She had flung herself in the hammock. But the interest of their talk had brought her first to a sitting posture, then to a standing posture, and finally to a rustic bench posture.

"Ah, but you mustn't think just because she was amazing that she wasn't also perfectly human—sometimes almost desperately so, O'Donnell!"

"Yes, I suppose so. I can somehow picture her—especially the desperate times."

"Well, of course she did have her eccentricities. For instance, her temper. To the last it remained most alarmingly and deliciously undependable."

"To the last?"

"Ah, yes—poor Tessie!"

"Tessie?"

"I always called her that. It wasn't strictly Tahulamajian, but she adored the name."

"So the Queen is dead?"

"Yes, Queen Tess died early in the spring. She was terribly old, but game right up to the last minute. You never saw such gameness. The funeral was immensely impressive."

"Whole populace turned out, of course?"

"R*ather*. Ostracism threatened against any who stayed away without a valid excuse! And they carried her along, all dresesd up in her robes of state, and even with a crown on. Poor, dear Tessie! How often she used to say to me in private, when the mats were all snug over the doors: 'You know there are times,' she'd say, 'when I have my doubts about all this sovereign divinity business. It's down in the state books that I'm one of the direct line, descended from Mentise-huhu and the gods of the Sea Foam. But there are times when I have my doubts,' she used to say. 'There are times when I seem to be just Tessie, and between you and me, I'm coming to suspect that there never were any gods of the Sea Foam at all!' "

O'Donnell smiled at her look of momentary abstraction. What a life Marjory's had been—what a life! Here he found her, at last, in the heart of a religious colony. But at one time she had sold bonds in Wall Street; she had been an agent for a Pacific steamship line; she had been a political organizer in the North-west; and she had once served as associate editor of a newspaper. Yes, she had always struck O'Donnell—himself so simple and homely of nature—as most violently revolutionary.

He remembered how, in the early days, she used to march in suffrage parades. She had taken up Socialism and dropped it; had smoked; and he distinctly recalled her having used, in her time, quite sporty language. Once she had had something to do with the races, and had worn a derby. And yet . . .

"Well," he mused, "after all it's the same Marjory."

"You think so?" She was amused.

"Yes, the same old Marjory. I wonder if there ever was a time when you weren't 'advanced.' "

"You call *me* advanced? My dear fellow, I must refer you—"

"I know, I know," he protested. "You forget I've come to know them all. Perhaps," he added slyly, "I'm growing just a little advanced myself!"

"You?"

"Can you imagine?"

"Oh, well—"

"In my old age—fancy that!"

"True, I'd forgotten the poet."

"Well," he admitted, "one lives and learns."

"We all do that, you know."

"Oh, yes."

"Well, but do you mean we've nothing left to quarrel about? Has it really come to *such* a pass?"

"I do." He spoke almost solemnly. It was a little like the "I do" of the marrige rite.

"Barrett! Good heavens! What's the world coming to?"

"I don't know," he replied naïvely. "I only know there are no grounds left. I've capitulated, you see, at every point."

"Tut, tut!"

"*Every point!*" he insisted. No compromise would do. It might amaze her, might snatch the ground from under her feet; he would admit, at last, no compromise.

She grew whimiscal, then a new earnestness creeping into her voice: "You know," she said, "I've come to suspect some of this talk of being 'advanced.' I mean"—for she felt his enquiring gaze—"I've come at length to suspect that in just going ahead. . . . Barrett, for heaven's sake help me out!" For once in her life—and it was surely a portentous symptom—Miss Whitcom was groping.

"Well," she went on at last, still speaking earnestly, if fumblingly, "I'm not sure I *can* express at all what I feel. It's what I've been coming to feel more and more—no doubt a gradual development up out of the cocksure attitude of one's—Barrett, I've begun using a dreadful and ruthless word—one's immaturity. . . !" She tossed her head. "It doesn't mean I don't still believe in all the fine, big movements. You know"—her voice for a moment grew almost tender—"I always looked upon myself as one of the first of the 'new' women. I wasn't going at things blindly. I was always following an ideal,

Barrett, even when the things I did seemed most wild and inexplicable. But as I look back I seem to have been following strange roads in an effort to reach it! How strange! And now—yes, only fancy, as you say: in one's old age!—I'm afraid I see in a way that 'progress' can be overdone. That is, I've come to see that progress is something you can't *force*. Yet there have to be pioneers in the world, don't there, Barrett? People who are reckless, and pay the price, and aren't afraid of going too far. . . . Yes, I realize that, as I've always realized it. But oh, Barrett, Barrett—I'm afraid I'm getting to be very, very selfish. I've been a pioneer so long, and after all I don't quite want to be a pioneer to the very end of my days. I—I somehow feel I want to stop being one before—oh, Barrett, before it's quite too *late . . . !*"

"I think," said O'Donnell slowly, his voice just a little shaken, "if the time has come for plain speaking like this, you'd better let me hold your hand. Do you mind?"

"Listen to him!" she said, in one of her richest tones of banter.

All the same, she let him have it.

While these important events were proceeding, Louise, who had not gone to find Mr. Barry, after all, but who had returned to her room instead, slept a little. She was unused to such early rising, and she had been through a great deal since dawn.

She slept, and had a dream. She dreamed that she and Leslie were to be married. She seemed to be very much excited, and to be surrounded by a crowd of indefinite persons, some of them friends she now possessed, and some of them friends she had known in her early girlhood. And all the while she was happily arguing: "I know I'm a little bit older, but we love each other so much that just a mere couple of years don't count."

Waking with a start to problems more sinister than merely that involving a conventional disagreement of ages, Louise perceived that it had drawn to the golden midst of afternoon. Lynndal was waiting for her. As the curious, almost hypnotic quality of the dream wore off, she responded to another flash of new purpose. The dream still haunted and oppressed her; at first it had made her sad; but as it faded into a renewed appreciation of that humiliating conversation beside the driftwood shed, a mood of rebellion came upon her.

She tossed her head haughtily: Leslie should be allowed to make no further difference to her. She would thrust him entirely out of her life. He ought never really to have entered it. No, she shouldn't have given herself to Leslie, even temporarily. It had produced an unpleasant situation, and afforded him an opportunity now to fling all her kindness back in her face. He had, indeed, treated her shamefully—not at all as he had treated her earlier in the day. At dawn. . . . But she murmured

angrily: "This is the return one gets for trying to be nice to a man!"

The new mood inclined her, in a subtle way, toward Lynndal—as abruptly as it had hardened her heart against Leslie. The emotion of the moment illuminated the former in an almost rosy manner. She began thinking of Lynndal warmly and romantically—as she had thought of him during those long months when they were far apart. Her attitude again became the attitude she had maintained throughout the period of their increasingly affectionate correspondence. And the sense of his nearness seemed no longer to distract or terrify her. Excitement stirred in her breast. It leapt to her eyes and trembled upon her lips. She had never loved Lynndal so almost tempestuously. Strong emotion of this sort always had a beautifying effect upon Miss Needham. Her face glowed as she encouraged the rekindling passion. She fanned the flame of her love for Lynndal, and at the same time a soft sense of steadfastness and assurance snuffed out the dismal quandary which had wracked and tortured her soul from the moment she saw him up on the deck of the steamer. Some mad whim, she argued feverishly, had filled her with a panic of indecision and dread; but that was gone now. She whipped the purging passion into new and fantastic fervour. Her laugh had a touch of wildness in it. Even Richard had never moved her like this!

Suddenly, a little chill seized her heart. What if already it were too late? What if, by her coldness and aloofness, she had already created in Lynndal's heart a havoc which could not be rescinded? Was it not wholly conceivable that she had killed his love for her? Had she not shown herself perverse, cruel, and irredeemably fickle? Perhaps now the tables would be turned, and he would draw away from her, even as she had shrunk from him. The thought had a maddening influence: she felt momentarily faint and distracted. Then a new energy of determination blazed in her eyes. It must *not* be too late. She *must* win him back, however far her wretched conduct may have driven him.

Louise dressed with elaborate care, giving heed to every eloquent detail of her toilette. She tore off the brooch Richard had given her and flung it into her jewel box with a gesture of gay scorn. No more toying and trifling! She was ready now to give herself completely and for all time—the more ready because of that uneasy little tremor of doubt lest she had killed his love. Yes, it was a wonderful moment—a moment so packed with the frenzy of giving that there remained no other thought at all in her mind. She lived for the moment alone. She made herself radiant for Lynndal, the emotion which swayed her growing more and more riotous. She surrendered herself to it. He was waiting for her. And she went down to him hopefully, wistfully, yet withal triumphantly.

"Which way?" asked Lynndal as they descended the short bluff and reached the hard, surf-packed shore.

"I don't care," she laughed up at him. "Shall we go this way?"

It didn't matter to Barry. All ways were equal to him, since he was really and truly in love and spent no great amount of attention upon the scenery. He looked at her adoringly. His quiet eyes were dazzled.

They strolled along close beside the little waves. It was rather a picture. She was charmingly gowned, and carried a small plum parasol.

"Let me take your coat, dear," he suggested.

She gave him the light silk wrap, and he carried it on his arm, crooked almost pathetically for the purpose.

"I don't wonder you like it up here," he said, looking off over the sparkling water. "If we had this in the centre of the desert. . . ."

"I suppose it would make a difference." All at once she pictured the desert. She pictured herself living in the midst of the desert with Lynndal.

Then the dry-farming expert went on to explain, at some length, just what would happen were this sea to be transported to the parched heart of Arizona. The words began falling a little dully on her ears. She was vaguely troubled. But she could not tell just why it should be so.

There was a silence. They walked along slowly

side by side. A wave of happiness stole upon the man; his hand, encountering hers, closed over it tenderly.

She caught her breath a little. "Lynndal," she cautioned, "you mustn't. . . ."

But he clung to her hand. He had come so far! And again she seemed to hear those terrible words booming in her ears: "You are mine, all mine!"

Slowly his arm crept round her waist. There was nothing overwhelming about the action: Barry was not an overwhelming man, and had not an overwhelming way with him. His was, rather, a kind of gentle, furtive passion, which displayed itself in a very slight trembling, an occasional queer huskiness of voice.

All at once Louise grew alarmed. It seemed to her that a terrible and inevitable moment had come. She wasn't entirely prepared. *She must have more time . . . !*

"Please take your arm away, Lynndal," she said tensely.

"But why, dear?"

"Please! The cottagers. . . ."

"But Louise, dear, there isn't a cottage in sight." They had, indeed, proceeded by this time well around the Point. "There's no one to see, and besides. . . ."

She glanced up shyly. His face was kind. His eyes were pleading and full of quiet reassurance. Did he suspect a little the turmoil within her? There

was no reason why his arm shouldn't be about her; yet her mind went on groping. It was like being in a thick wood. Could she give herself to him entirely? Could she give herself to *anyone* entirely?

"Louise, I love you," he murmured, bending down so that his lips were close to her cheek.

She trembled. But she told herself that he had come to her out of the desert; that he was her lover; and that she must give herself to him without any more restraint. Why had she led him on and on if she didn't intend to give herself fully at last?

"Louise, dearest. . . . Louise!"

"Yes, Lynndal. . . ."

"I love you so much!"

The old panic surged again, but she fought it back. "For ever and ever—nobody but me. . . ." Yet there were so many others. . . . Chaos again enveloped the girl.

"Won't you kiss me?"

His arms were adoringly about her. His lips came close to hers. It was time, now, to give herself. She raised her lips.

They kissed.

But a great cry was in her heart: "I *can't!*" It was almost as though he had heard it, for he let her slip way; and she stood there before him, her head lowered, her hands desperately covering her face.

Louise thought blindly of Richard—what their

first kiss had been like . . . ! And then she remembered how, afterward, she had longed for death. With what completeness the situation now was reversed! Now she was loved, and it was she who would break her lover's heart. Yet still the same swift longing for death. . . .

They walked on slowly. Barry's head was lowered. Finally he asked thickly: "Don't you love me, then?"

She bent her head lower and could not answer. The fault was her own, and he must suffer for it. Yet stealthy colour crept back into her cheeks; her mood grew muddy and subtly defiant. Was not he making *her* suffer?

It wasn't, she blindly felt, so much that she didn't love him, as that, strangely and tragically, he must be all to her—and she could not face it.

How strange it was! How unpremeditated and utterly tragic! In his pocket huddling against the little box with its precious prisoner, was a letter in which the amplest and most ardent affection was expressed. It was a letter which expressed an earnest desire for his coming—so eager. Barry was bewildered. What did such lightning-swift changes of heart signify? Had she only *imagined* herself in love? What was this that had come to him? Had he come out of the desert for nothing after all? Was all the promise of new life sheer illusion?

They walked on a little way and then turned slowly back.

PART THREE

The Light

1

THE Rev. Needham awoke from his siesta wonderfully refreshed. These benign afternoon snoozes had a peculiar and sometimes quite poignant effect. The minister dimly felt it must have something to do with psychology. For he always awoke feeling so spiritual, so calm and strong. Today, of course, there was particularly traceable cause: he had gone to sleep, one must remember, in a miraculously resolute, yes, a truly masterful, mood. Did we call it Nietzschean? Well, perhaps it really was almost that. At any rate, waking was delicious. There was a largeness, a breadth about life which made one want to square one's shoulders, step out proudly. Before the dresser mirror, in the act of resuming collar and tie, the Rev. Needham actually did square his shoulders a little. He even threw out his chest somewhat. Oh, it is sweet to be master of one's own destiny!

Out on the porch he found his wife, rocking there all by herself and looking a little vacantly off at the shrubs and trees.

"Ah, Anna," he said; then perched himself in a nonchalant, really an almost rakish manner, on the

railing, throwing one leg over the other, and folding his arms. He yawned a little audibly, concluding that function with a kind of masterful, contented smacking of the lips—even whistled a few bars of a gay secular tune.

"Did you sleep well, Alf?" Anna Needham spoke calmly, rocked calmly. She still eyed the shrubs and trees in a spirit of almost hypnotized calm.

"I had a magnificent nap," he assured her.

Anna rocked more slowly. "Alf," she hesitated.

"Yes, Anna?"

"Alf, I wonder if I can be getting old . . . ?"

"Old, Anna?" He was really quite shocked at the suggestion.

"Yes—I don't know. Sometimes. . . ."

"Nonsense!"

"I don't know. . . ." she continued dreamily.

"But why should you ever think such a thing?"

"Well, lately there've been times when I've felt so kind of still. I don't know, but I thought—I thought it might be. . . ."

"Why, Anna . . . !" he cried in vaguely frightened tones.

"I don't know, Alf." Her manner retained its essential dreaminess. "Sometimes when I sit alone rocking, I feel so kind of still. . . ."

The minister laughed, then, with even an attempt at something like boisterousness; but it was plain something of his earlier flamboyancy had vanished.

Abruptly, right in the heyday of his most glorious mood, the shortness of life struck him with uncanny force. Life's shortness, and, though he indignantly repudiated the insinuation, its relative futility, after all. Where had one come from in the beginning; just what was it one was up to now; and where was it one would go when the breath of life ceased flowing? Oh, what a piece of work is man! These were the secret inner workings. With a thrill of genuine horror the minister found himself asking what he knew, as a fact, after all these years of preaching it, about the immortality of the soul. It was terrible, *terrible!* Oh, that he should be afflicted with such doubts! And not ten minutes ago the Rev. Needham had squared his shoulders and flashed so grand a defiance at his own reflection. . . .

Curiously enough, this sudden unpleasant sense of renewed insecurity was augmented, at the moment when it was most acute, by the rippling laughter of his approaching sister-in-law. Miss Whitcom and her friend were returning from their tête-à-tête in the bower. The laugh, whatever it might mean to the minister, signified that the lady was not, so easily, to be carried off her feet, and that, however thrillingly she might talk about not being a pioneer any longer, no mere travelling man was to capture her without at least a concluding scramble.

Barrett O'Donnell knew quite well what the laugh signified. But it didn't, for all that, very greatly disturb him. Lord, he'd waited twenty years: he

could wait twenty more, if necessary. There is not that hot impetuosity in the affection of souls matured which characterizes youth; not that fever, that restless, exquisite rush of heady devotion. Still, there is perhaps something in being quite sure your love isn't misplaced. Yes, in a way, to be sure may be even better than to possess.

The return of Miss Whitcom and Mr. O'Donnell from one direction fell simultaneously with the return of Louise and Lynndal Barry from another. The porch became a very lively place, all at once, where a few moments before it had been so quiet, with only the minister's wife there, rocking. . . . Louise was greatly relieved that it should be so. To have returned to a silent and deserted house after what had passed between herself and Lynndal on the beach must have proved next to unbearable. As it was, the frantic difficulty of the situation would be lightened, if only temporarily.

Marjory pounced at once upon the westerner, turning from her ancient suitor with a careless alacrity which seemed saying: "After all, I am free, quite superbly free!" And O'Donnell muttered an "Ah!" scarce audibly; and what he meant by it was this: "I know you'll come back to me. You always have and you always will. We are not *quite* free, either of us, in one sense of the word." One glorious, indomitable sense of the word.

Marjory wanted to know more about the dam in Arizona, and especially she wanted to get at the

other side of this tragic love affair—this bit of high tragedy in humble setting. In art, she thought, tragedy has a way of being generally treated nobly and loftily; but in life, somehow, it often seems almost absurd. Yes, first it was the dam. But she did not really care two straws about the dam. She had got beyond all such things as dams in her pilgrimage.

The Rev. Needham opened up a conversation about the Point with O'Donnell. But he kept eyeing his daughter, who leaned against the railing of the porch, her hands clasped before her. Alfred, despite his calling, was a wretched reader of souls. The look in one's eyes or the line of one's lips meant next to nothing, definitely—if only because these things might mean so bafflingly *much*. . . . If you actually shed tears, then he would be reasonably sure you must be unhappy. Hearty laughter signified, of course, a state of hilarity. However, the Rev. Needham's spirit, with Milton's, took, really, no middle course. There lay an almost blank chasm between tears and laughter—although, alas, the fact of its being a chasm did not make it any less conducive to prickles in one's suspended heels.

"There's only one thing," O'Donnell was observing, "—only one thing I've got against this place."

"What's that?" asked the minister.

"There are so many signs!"

It took the Rev. Needham just a moment to comprehend what was meant. "You mean the Assembly notices?"

"I suppose that's what they are. If you'll pardon my saying so, it seems sometimes as though there's a sign on every tree. One says you mustn't peel the birch bark, and the next one announces a lecture on such and such a day."

"I'm afraid they have multiplied the last few seasons," admitted the minister. "We don't seem to notice—so used to them, I suppose. There are picnickers, you know—come from other parts— and we have to look out for the natural beauty or it will be all spoiled. As for the lecture announcements," he concluded, "the—the church, you know, has to keep pace, nowadays. Yes, it—it has to advertise a little!" He spoke almost glibly, and sighed; but quite brightly, indeed almost chirpily.

Miss Whitcom caught the confession. And she hopped down at once off Mr. Barry's fine Arizona dam—which diverted water into a huge reservoir, thus keeping off the Needham wolf—and administered what might vulgarly be termed a knock-out.

"I should say it does have to advertise! Oh, yes, the church must *indeed* hustle to keep pace! Even so, I hear the attendance is dropping off."

"Marjory?" began her brother-in-law with unhappy and interrogative vehemence. The low bow, alas, would do no good at all here. This woman was unspeakable. She struck him as almost a monster! Not that this was manifest, of course; it was merely the way she struck his invisible soul.

"Oh, gracious, Alfred, I don't mean *your* attend-

ance. I'm not referring to your particular church. I speak as a sociologist—a biologist!" She laughed. "Yes, I always try to consider these things in the broadest sense. And I don't see why you should look so shocked, for after all I'm only agreeing with you. Don't you see I am? The church *does* have to advertise. Has to stir up public controversies for the sake of getting itself discussed—always biologically speaking, Alfred. It has to get itself recognized as a social force. That's the word: a social force! It must be a little sensational even, sometimes, to match the growing sensationalism of life. What more natural? An atmosphere of spry colloquialism. Yes, the modern church must compete. Why *not* introduce the movies into Sunday School—?"

"We haven't yet done any of these things, Marjory," declared the Rev. Needham earnestly, a trifle coolly. He seemed really to insist upon receiving all her shafts personally.

"Some churches do though," volunteered O'Donnell —and laughed a little nervously.

Mrs. Needham had been following the conversation, glancing first at one speaker then at another; now she spoke: "Marjory, how do you ever manage to keep track of everything that's going on here in America?" It was not the first time since her arrival amongst them that Anna's sister had amazed her with a grasp of home affairs—often with flashes of vision which had been closed to her before.

"Oh," replied Marjory with pleasant lightness, "but

you see such demonstrations as these exude an influence—it's a little like the wireless. One feels their thrill all around the earth."

"Besides," interposed O'Donnell quite seriously, "you know Tahulamaji's awfully advanced."

"Is it?" asked Mrs. Needham guilelessly, turning towards him.

"Oh, tremendously," he assured her. "As I make it out Queen Tess was one of the most advanced women of her time. I tell you, things move in Tahulamaji!"

Mrs. Needham had not hitherto felt, as she indefinitely put it to herself, very well acquainted with this travelling man friend of her sister's. Suddenly she found herself holding the centre of the stage with him. It amounted to a little thrill.

"I suppose, after all, things aren't so differnt there —conditions, should I say?"

"Well," hedged O'Donnell, beginning to perceive that he had entered somewhat dangerous waters. He glanced at Miss Whitcom, who merely shrugged her shoulders, which seemed equivalent to an assurance that, having involved himself unnecessarily in her behalf, he might just flounder along, so far as she was concerned, until kingdom come.

"Maybe," suggested the minister's wife with a dart of genuine brilliance, "the churches do all those things in Tahulamaji!" Would it not seem to explain Marjory's being so uncannily well informed?

The Rev. Needham inwardly fidgeted. He felt he

ought to be in the forefront of the discussion, defending his cloth. But suddenly he seemed, within, sadly and impotently, to have nothing to say. There were times when he felt he didn't possess a single honest prejudice any more, or hold one single irrefragable opinion. What a fortunate thing for the soul is its kind bulwark of flesh!

Anna's suggestion at length stirred Miss Whitcom, however. "Oh, no," she said quietly, "they don't."

"Still," O'Donnell objected, "you told me the Queen was incorrigibly modern, and you said she adored the movies."

"Oh, we're modern," replied Marjory with an ungodly smirk. "Yes, we're modern enough in Tahulamaji. I may say we're quite in the van of civilization. We're so modern that we *haven't* any churches. So how *could* we advertise?"

"No churches, Marjory?" queried her brother-in-law. "But you seem to forget—"

"Well, at least nothing you'd call a church, I'm sure, Alfred—outside of what the foreigners have imported, that is. A few little rude native altars. . . . That's all. You know, 'when two or three are gathered together'. . . . It's—well, I've sometimes felt it's the *spirit* that counts in Tahulamaji, when it comes to matters of religion. Everything's very, very simple. We really haven't time to do it the grand way, even if we knew how."

They hadn't time for church in Tahulamaji! The awful question which now wracked the soul of the

minister was: If they hadn't time for church, what *had* they time for? A dimly terrifying curiosity assailed him. The Rev. Needham had read vague things about the people of the tropics. And a flush overspread his lined, worried face.

Yes, Marjory was an odd sheep, if not a black one. Perhaps she could hardly be called a *black* one, though there were certainly times when the Rev. Needham saw her as through smoked glasses. Anyway, an odd sheep she certainly was. She did not seem to belong in the herd at all—let alone the family! The rest were all quiet, sensible, orthodox. But about everything Marjory said or did there was something unorthodox, something wickedly theatrical. What a past she had had! Just think of it! Just think, for instance, of spending five whole years of one's life in a place like Tahulamaji! Well, the ways of God were unsearchable. So, it seemed, were the ways of His satanic opponent. The reason she seemed different from themselves must be, fundamentally, that she had had a past. But why had she had a past? Yes, the minister's speculations always must terminate with the knottiest question raised and unanswered. It seemed a part of his destiny.

And meanwhile, there stood Louise and Lynndal, not six feet apart, yet never meeting each other's look; never speaking. How unpremeditated and tragic! He had come all the way from Arizona, and now they had nothing to say to each other. Louise, leaning wretchedly against the railing, seemed, just

now, able to realize nothing clearly. The episode on the beach had confused her. She felt herself baffled.

As for Barry's state of mind, that, also, was considerably cloudy. It had happened—the inconceivable, the impossible—and it was now over. Yet was it really over? In just a swift moment like this had *all* his dreams been broken? It seemed incredible: he could not believe it. He tried to reassure himself, endeavoured to keep hope alight. Something wise and still, deep in his heart, counseled patience. It might be she was only confused: it seemed strange to her, having suddenly a reality like this in place of her dreams. Louise was a dreamer —he knew that. And what might be going on inside her wayward little head, who could guess? So far Barry had only distinguished himself as a wizard of the burning sands. He was a man who could make deserts bloom like the rose. Yet who could say but perhaps he knew a little, too, about the subtler bloom of a woman's heart? Patience, he argued within himself. It might be she was only puzzled, and that she still loved him in spite of the thing that had happened. He would be patient a little while. If it turned out at last that there was no hope, why, then he would go back to the desert again. That was all.

2

IT was nearly five o'clock when Leslie and Hilda emerged from the woods with their supply of roasting sticks. They had gone about their task in the most leisurely fashion, mutually animated by a curious half complacent acceptance of each other's presence. Merely being together had become such a complete yet informal delight that neither of them stopped to analyse it at all. And yet, if their hands chanced to brush, or, as happened once when a bee threatened, she laid her hand a little clutchingly on his shoulder, the emotion quickened. They hadn't much to say to each other, although a good deal of talk, such as it was, passed between them. Neither could remember afterward anything that was said. And all they had intrinsically to show for their afternoon was an armful of roasting sticks.

"Where shall we keep them until it's time?" asked Hilda, as they tramped through the sand and up to the screened porch.

He gazed dreamily off to sea.

"Les?" she repeated, quaintly drawling.

"Hm?"

"What shall we do with the sticks? Leave them

here? Or do you want to take them down where the fire's going to be?"

"Oh," he said at last, "I don't care." And he let himself down slowly on to the steps. "I feel so dreamy I can hardly move. Did you ever feel like that, Hilda?"

"Yes, many times," she replied, sitting down one step above him and clasping her knees. Her canvas hat was tossed aside, and the hair on her forehead was a little damp. There ensued a long, drowsy silence. At length she said: "I hope we cut enough, Les."

He was still gazing off across the sea, which the declining sun was making flash in a splendid and quite dazzling way. It was merely a warm, hypnotic stare, and he really saw nothing at all; yet he was faintly conscious of things—above all, he was conscious of a feeling of simple young happiness.

"Les?"

"Hm?"

"You do think we cut enough, don't you?"

"Sure, I guess so."

"It would be so funny," she laughed, "if there didn't happen to be enough to go round and some had to just sit and watch the others eat!"

"Most of them do that anyway, don't they?" he murmured. "I mean they sit there and watch you work like a slave, and then swallow everything that's poked in front of their mouths. I guess all roasts are alike."

"Well, anyhow, *we* won't feed any of the lazy-bones tonight, Les. We'll eat our own! I'll feed you, and you feed me. Will you?"

He glanced up at her and smiled. Then he slid down a step and lay back, resting his head against the step on which she sat, a little to one side.

"You look quite different upside down," he volunteered.

"How, Les?"

"Oh—I don't know. Your eyes look so funny!"

"Yours do, too!"

He thrust a sun-browned arm over his eyes and crossed his legs. It was she who now gazed off over the blazing waves. Not exactly a classic tableau. You would never mistake them for Romeo and Juliet. And yet our little ubiquitous friend Eros viewed the picture not without a smouldering, an incipient satisfaction.

Louise came out of the living room door on to the porch. She could see Hilda's head and shoulders, and she crossed over to the screen door at the top of the flight. Hilda looked round quickly.

"Oh, hello, Lou!"

Louise nodded, and made motions of salutation with her lips. There was no sound, however. She cleared her throat—tried to smile.

Leslie drew himself hurriedly into a more dignified posture. "Hello," he smiled, rising a trifle uneasily.

"Just see how many we got!" cried Hilda, jump-

ing up and gathering the roasting sticks in her arms.

Louise stood there looking down through the screen door. "You certainly got enough!" she exclaimed, a little shrilly—the result of her trying so desperately to be perfectly natural.

"Well," Hilda went on, "you see I kept finding little trees so straight we simply couldn't pass them by. And Leslie just kept cutting. See how sharp they are?"

Leslie, as though availing himself of the invitation (regardless of its not having been exactly addressed to him) placed a finger on one of the smoothly whittled points and withdrew it with a small, oddly juvenile howl of mock distress. The wounded finger went into his mouth. Leslie was certainly *not* at his ease.

Suddenly Hilda ran up close to her sister and asked, in a very low voice: "Have you been crying?"

Louise's heart jumped. "Why, no," she replied.

"It must be the sun in your eyes," said Hilda.

"Yes, it must be." And she turned away from them and sat in the same chair her mother had occupied when she had demanded of Alfred if he thought she might be growing old. Louise rocked slowly, just as her mother had rocked. Yet her thoughts rushed madly to and fro. There was a battle of ghosts in her heart.

Aunt Marjie came out breezily, accompanied by

Mr. O'Donnell, who was about to take his departure. The parent Needhams stood side by side in the cottage doorway, hospitably bowing, but seeming to realize, with a kind of fineness, that they should come no further, and that the very last rites must be performed by the lady for whose sake he had been asked.

Mr. O'Donnell extended a hand of farewell to Louise, who rose.

"Oh, are you going?" she asked.

"Yes—simply have to. They'll decide at the Elmbrook that I'm lost, strayed, or stolen and will have a search party out!"

"Good-bye, Mr. O'Donnell," said Hilda, prettily holding out her hand. She was deliciously unspoiled.

He held her hand a moment, looked from her over to Leslie, then at the bunch of sharpened sticks. And he brazenly winked at Miss Whitcom, who, glancing discreetly in the direction of her elder niece, remarked that there was likely to be a gorgeous sunset.

O'Donnell and Leslie shook hands. "See you again tonight?" asked the boy politely.

"Yes, indeed!" Mrs. Needham called out. "He's coming over to the roast."

"You'll have a devil—I mean, it's very dark in the woods," said Leslie. He was quite horrified at the slip, and hurried on, expressing quick generosity by way of gaining cover—a generosity more gener-

ous, no doubt, than he had at first contemplated. "You'd better let me come and light you through."

O'Donnell patted the lad's shoulder in a very kindly manner, just as he might pat an obliging bell-hop in one of the hotels on his route, who volunteered to get him up for a five o'clock train.

"Oh, no," he said. "Don't you bother."

"No bother at all," replied Leslie, suddenly seeming to grow quite enthusiastic over the idea of lighting Mr. O'Donnell through from Crystalia. His eye encountered Hilda's. It was finally agreed, and O'Donnell departed, in the very best sort of spirits.

When he had disappeared, the Rev. and Mrs. Needham strolled out on to the porch. The Rev. Needham was slowly gaining back his ruffled poise. He and O'Donnell had been smoking some more of the good cigars, and Marjory hadn't ventured anything so very revolutionary since the remark about not having time for church. He slipped an arm, just a tiny bit stiffly, about his wife's waist. He didn't exactly cuddle her; still, thus fortified, he looked across at his sister-in-law with an inner mild defiance.

"Well, I must run along," said Leslie, drawing a deep and very leisurely breath.

"Do you *have* to go so soon?" Hilda stepped down toward him.

He nodded, thrust his hands into his pockets, drew them out again, was painfully conscious that Louise was sitting up there on the porch.

Hilda came down another step and stood close to

him. "It's awfully early, Les." Then a brilliant idea sent her unexpectedly scurrying up the steps and on to the porch. She whispered something in her mother's ear, upon which Mrs. Needham looked somewhat startled and shook her head. She and Eliza had planned so carefully. Leslie seemed almost like one of the family; but what if there shouldn't be enough?

Hilda tossed it off gallantly. She tripped back down the steps and said she would go with Leslie as far as the choke-cherry tree.

"Good-bye," said Leslie politely to the porch.

"Good-bye, Leslie," said the Rev. and Mrs. Needham in unison.

And it never occurred to them as odd that their younger should be accompanying Leslie as far as the choke-cherry tree. Oh, the incredible blindness of parents! Oh, what strangers one's children really are, after all! And yet, how could it be otherwise? Quaint souls—perhaps they did not even remember, now Lynndal had come, that it was to the choke-cherry tree their elder had been wont to go. . . .

Louise called out: "'Bye, Les." She was rocking more vigorously. Her hands were clasped behind her head and her cheeks were flushed. There was a curious wild look in her eyes. Aunt Marjie thought her actually handsome just then.

At the choke-cherry tree Leslie and Hilda indulged in a very desultory leave-taking. Yet their talk was

utterly devoid of anything either poetic or romantic.

"You'll get your shoe all full of sand, Les." He was scuffing it mechanically back and forth in the dust of the roadway.

"I don't care."

"I hate to have sand in my shoes."

But he laughed: "I don't know what it is *not* to."

Then he patted the bark of the choke-cherry tree and ran his palm up and down it, as though he were a lumberman and knew all about trees. And he gazed up at the tiny ripening berries. Suddenly he stopped patting the trunk and turned, leaning his back against it. He stood there, confused a little, tapping first one heel and then the other against a projecting root; for his exploring hand, as it chanced, had encountered a certain recently carved set of initials within a rude heart. All that was so long ago!

"What shall we do about the sticks?" asked Hilda. "Shall we have papa carry them down to the fire?"

"No, I'll carry them down. I'll come over and get them."

"But you're going to light Mr. O'Donnell through from Crystalia," she reminded him—then waited breathlessly.

He didn't disappoint her. "*Please* come along—won't you?"

"You mean when you go to light him?"

"Yes."

"You really want me to?"

He nodded.

A man was approaching them. He came round a bend in the road. It was Lynndal Barry.

"I've been for a little stroll," he explained. "These woods are certainly wonderful!"

"Yes, we like them," replied Hilda, in a very polite but at the same time very friendly tone. She was just a tiny bit afraid of the man who had come so far to marry her sister—not because Mr. Barry was the kind of man who spreads about him an aura of awe, but because Hilda knew there was something the matter. Yes, something seemed to be wrong. But Hilda did not guess *how* wrong.

"Were you going back to the cottage?" she asked.

"Yes, I thought I would."

"Then I'll walk back with you, if you don't mind."

"Well, good-bye," said Leslie.

"Good-bye, Les. You'll come for me?"

"Yes."

"What time?"

"Whenever you say."

"Right after dinner?"

"All right."

"So long."

"So long, Hilda."

He departed, scuffing foolishly and happily in the sand.

"We were cutting sticks for the roast," explained Hilda as she walked back beside Lynndal toward Beachcrest.

"It will be jolly," he remarked. "You know, I've never been to one of these beach roasts in my life."

"You never have?"

"No. And I've looked forward to the beach roasts ever since—well, ever since I knew I was going to be up here this summer."

"You see, you came just in time!"

"Yes, didn't I?"

"The mid-summer Assembly Roast is the biggest roast of all."

"I'm in luck," he murmured.

And so they chatted together until Beachcrest was reached.

3

ON the porch, where Miss Whitcom had been regaling her relations with, it must be admitted, a rather sensational account of how the inhabitants of Tahulamaji had formerly been cannibals, the absence of Lynndal Barry was noticed.

"Where is he?" asked the Rev. Needham, with a quick inward flash of nervousness.

Louise was assailed by a great longing to come out, wildly and fully, with some superb flow of words which should ease the burden of her heart. It seemed urgent, in fact, that she explain his absence. Aunt Marjie braced herself for an expected scene. But just then the missing man put in an appearance. Hilda preceded him up the steps. Instead of crying out that her heart was breaking, Louise felt suddenly an insane desire to laugh. Hilda was leading Lynndal back, as though to compensate for leading Leslie off!

"Well, well," began the Rev. Needham, with all the hospitable bluffness he could summon. "We were talking about you!"

"—Wondering where you were," continued Mrs. Needham.

"—Fearing you might have embarked for the wicked city of Beulah," Marjory gaily carried it on, "where young men are not safe, and the song of the siren never dies away!"

The Rev. Needham looked startled, then rather grim, then again just vaguely uneasy. Barry explained that he had been strolling in the woods.

"No danger of getting lost, at any rate," declared Miss Whitcom, "since the church advertises so efficiently!"

There promised to be a rather pained silence; but Mrs. Needham rose, smoothed down the front of her skirt, and announced that she must go and dress for dinner.

"Ah, yes," lamented her sister cheerfully, "one must dress, even in the wilderness."

"Oh, we don't really make anything of it, Marjie. Only it sort of rests you—to make a change."

"Dress! Isn't it absurd? Yet how we dote on it! In this respect we aren't, after all, civilized to any dangerous degree. Why, in Tahulamaji—"

"Marjie, there isn't a bit of use of your changing. You look lovely."

"Thanks," replied her sister. "Still, one must."

"We all do just as we please up here in the woods, you know."

"Ah, but the men, the men," whispered Miss Whitcom with delicious vulgarity behind her hand. "And after all, we must have some regard for the conventions." Her tone was just a little pointed.

"Yes, Marjie, I suppose, in a way. . . ." Anna admitted.

"And then—there's the church," Miss Whitcom persisted, almost brutally whimsical.

"The church?"

"Since it tries so very hard to keep abreast of the times—one might say, *à la mode!*"

The sisters went into the cottage. Louise rose.

"I must dress too," she announced, crossing quickly to the door.

"I like that gown ever so much," said Lynndal.

She turned and cast him a rueful glance. "Thank you. But I really must change." She smiled faintly. The high colour had faded, and her eyes had lost their look of splendid wildness.

"Wait for me!" cried Hilda, making a tomboy dive for the door, and capturing her sister's waist, hanging on her affectionately as they went in together.

"At any rate, we don't have to dress," laughed the Rev. Needham quite jovially.

"You're sure? I'd begun to get rather scared. You see I didn't bring out anything. . . ."

The minister laughed again. "No, the men up here are more sensible."

"What did Miss Whitcom mean," asked Barry after a short pause, "when she spoke the way she did about the church?"

"The church, Barry?"

"Something about it being *à la mode.*"

"Oh, I—the fact is, Barry, I don't quite know myself. I'm sure she didn't mean anything in particular. That is, you see Marjory has a kind of playful way of speaking. . . . You have to know her well to understand her."

"She seems like a very jolly sort."

"Yes, yes. She's ever so jolly. Sometimes I feel. . . . Well, of course, every one has their times of being jollier than at other times, don't they?" There seemed something here appealing, a little pathetic, even—as though Alfred Needham, if he only *could* one day get his heels down, would turn out really very jolly himself.

The conversation was growing thin, a little vague. It was a relief to have the talk drift into other and more concrete channels.

"Well," remarked Barry, "just before I left for the East we got the final engineering report on the new San Pedro reservoir. It looks pretty good to me."

"Something to open up a whole new area?"

"Yes, that's it. By building another dam—" And he explained the rather technical proposition.

"A good deal like the Santa Cruz, isn't it?" asked the minister.

"Yes, a good deal like that. You can be pretty sure of the water near the source, but of course the farther downstream you go, the less dependable the flow is. Sometimes there will be floods, and then again sometimes the bed will go entirely dry."

"Yes, yes," said the Rev. Needham meditatively, and almost as though in these fluxes of the Arizona rivers he recognized a subtle resemblance to life's fluxes which kept him ever hopping. "Let's see," he continued, "do I own anything just there, in the San Pedro valley?"

"You certainly do," replied Barry, and he drew a map out of his pocket, spread it on his knee, hitched his chair a little closer, and traced the Needham holdings with his pencil. "This strip in Cochise County—that little triangular patch there where Pinal and Pima join. . . . It ought to add quite a bit to your income, when the deal is really swung."

The Rev. Needham sighed appreciatively. "I wouldn't have any of these opportunities if it weren't for you being right there on the spot to look out for things."

"Oh, I do what I can," said Barry quietly. He folded up the map and put it away. "You see I'm very much interested in Arizona—new settlers coming all the time—new homes under way. . . ." His eyes were dimly wistful. "Pretty soon we'll be getting another man in Congress. . . ."

"Barry, do you suppose later on you'll be getting into politics?"

"Politics?" He laughed it away a little, yet at the same time clung to it, too. "Oh—you never can tell." As a matter of fact, as Louise could have told her father, the spring of a secret ambition had

been touched. "Just now there's too much to do, developing—opening up the country. . . . There are plans in the air for another big power plant near Yuma. By the way, I can get you some shares there, if you like. As for politics. . . ."

The Rev. Needham folded his arms with quiet pride. This was a man after his very heart. Perhaps he would be a Representative at Washington some day. Perhaps he would be Governor some day. And in the meantime, here he was, coming right into the family! No, the Rev. Needham could not have been any prouder of a son.

Upstairs all the ladies were in the midst of their toilettes. "O, world! O, life! O, time!"

"Are you girls putting on low neck?" demanded Miss Whitcom in her shrill way.

"Lou is," replied Hilda. "She always dresses when there's anything to go to, but I never do." She sighed. "Just think, Aunt Marjie, I haven't got a single low neck!"

"Cheer up, little one!" the aunt called over the three-quarters partition. "Your time's coming. I don't see—achu!—what you do about sunburn up here! *Achu!*"

She was deluging her neck and face with powder. Fortunately they were only going to a roast, and there wouldn't be much light, especially after the fire began to die down. Then she started slightly and frowned. Why on earth should one be concerned

about a little sunburn? And yet—there was a thrill in the question, too. Miss Whitcom admitted she never would have been so concerned in the old days. These were new days. After all, Barrett seemed the only reality there was left. Yet there had seemed so many realities to begin with.

"Louise, what's the matter?" whispered Hilda, as she slipped a fresh jumper over her head and began tying its lace.

"What makes you think there's anything the matter?" asked her sister thickly.

"I know there is! You don't act like yourself at all. Is it—is there something about you and Mr. Barry?"

Louise's throat ached. She did not start, nor did she flush and cry out: "How did you guess?" Her throat ached; it ached cruelly.

"Lou, dear—*tell* me what's the matter!" implored Hilda, throwing her arms around her sister, and laying her cheek against the other's shoulder a moment.

"I—I can't," faltered Louise.

"Yes, you can. I knew there was something!"

Louise shook her head wretchedly.

"Doesn't he seem the same?"

"Don't, Hilda!" She wriggled nervously.

"Louise!"

"I—I. . . ." She pushed herself free of an embrace which possessed, just now, no comfort. "Please don't say anything more. You mustn't."

"Well, I won't, Lou dear. Only it makes me feel bad to see you look this way. And I know there's *something* the matter."

"No, there isn't," replied Louise woodenly.

Hilda discovered, far in an unfrequented corner of her own little special chest of drawers which had been moved in out of Aunt Marjie's way, a fine new scarf. It was a scarf she had never worn before. Indeed, she had forgotten all about it. Now she remembered it had been put away carefully, with the understanding that it was to be brought out for some very special occasion. Her heart told her the golden hour had come. Her heart was so full of news that it began singing.

"We're going to light Mr. O'Donnell through to the roast!"

"Who?" asked Louise. She spoke impulsively, as all the Needhams were in the habit of speaking. Had she thought a moment she would not have asked.

Hilda told her, with a thrill of most abundant happiness. She hugged her happiness; she did not know what it cost her sister.

Louise braced herself. The evening had to be got through somehow. But after tonight—then what? Her father would be expecting Lynndal to come to him to talk it over. And how terrible! Would it, perhaps—her thoughts were flying helter-skelter—would it perhaps make some fatal difference in the Western business? Would Lynndal

continue to look after the interests, just as before? Could any one reasonably expect the relations all around to remain *quite* what they had been?

Remorse stole dully over her. She had come between her father and his friend. Could he forgive her? And could her father? Why had she done such a thing? But *was* it final? All those letters. . . . At length he was here . . . had come so far . . . and what had she done? In the morning she had gone to meet her lover. It had seemed fine and romantic. She had told Leslie they must be only friends now. It had all appeared quite easy and rather delightful. Then Lynndal had come, and . . . and then what? What was it that had happened? It had seemed to her that she could not give herself up. . . .

If only she could have a sudden change of heart! One read of such things, now and then. If only she could rush joyously down to him, where he sat talking with her father, and tell him she *did* love him! But after all, she could only go on dressing, miserably dressing.

"Do I look all right, Lou?" asked Hilda, much as Louise had put the same question to her at dawn.

Her sister told the plain truth in a syllable. Yes. She certainly did. Of course a jumper, even with so fine a new sash under its collar, wasn't quite as nice as low neck. But Hilda was undeniably charming. Louise felt a sudden elemental pang of jealousy.

Hilda's heart was in a great flutter. She liked Les-

lie ever so well. She didn't know any other boy she liked so well as Leslie. Have a care, little Hilda. Ah, have a care! Your age protects you. But later, when you have substituted loving for liking, things will be different. When Louise was your age she let Harold Gates kiss her a great many times. She let him put his arm around her, and when he had to leave her on account of the girl he had brought along with him to the picnic, she did not care—very much. Or at least she did not care very *long*. But now see, Hilda. Your sister has become a woman. She has learned to love, and play quite fearlessly with love. But love is a terrible thing, and your sister is not very wise.

Have a care, Hilda! As you value what is precious and fine in life—beware! Oh, Hilda, beware, when the heart has matured, that you do not reap a whirlwind of ghosts. . . .

4

AT dinner Miss Whitcom was treated to an entrancing account of the Assembly Roast, viewed as an institution.

"Of course," explained the Rev. Needham, "in the largest sense it's a religious function—a kind of general get-together, before the lecture season opens." It seemed a now more cautious way of reiterating that the church must advertise.

"But you see," contributed Mrs. Needham, "it was started by the Goodmans. He's a clergyman from Cleveland."

"It's their anniversary," added Hilda.

Thus, piecemeal, the momentous facts came out.

"Anniversary?"

"Yes, Aunt Marjie."

"Let's see—how many is it this year?" asked Mrs. Needham turning to her husband.

"Twenty-seventh or twenty-eighth, I think," he replied.

"Oh, Alf, do you think the Goodmans have been married that long?"

"You know," declared Miss Whitcom, "all this is interesting but terribly mysterious. Thanks, Anna, I've had the pickles. I'm mystified by these

Goodmans from Cleveland. So I understand the Midsummer Roast is in the nature of an anniversary party also?"

"Well, yes," replied Anna Needham. "It was started, I guess, more than twenty years ago, even before we began coming up here. There were only a few families at first. Alf, were the Goodmans the first to begin coming up?"

"Unless it was Blakes," he suggested.

"But didn't the Blakes begin coming because the Goodmans did, Alf?"

"Well, maybe so. Marjory, can't I help you to a little more of the lamb?"

"No, no," protested his sister-in-law. "I'm doing famously."

"Alf, Marjie will have some more potatoes, I'm sure."

"No. Doing *fam*ously. Never mind my plate, but do let's get it straight about the Goodmans. Thanks, Hilda, I will have another biscuit. It all sounds terribly romantic!"

"Yes, it is," Hilda boldly assured her. "They always kiss right before everybody on their anniversary. And in the morning—"

"Hilda!" cautioned her father, rather sternly.

The girl endeavoured to conceal her confusion by addressing herself very elaborately to the spreading of a biscuit.

"Oh, now, Alfred," remonstrated his sister-in-law, "you're worse than a war censor! Since it's

quite apparent the whole Point knows about the kissing—Anna, *may* I trouble you for another glass of water?—why shouldn't I be admitted to so very large a secret? There's surely room for one more, and you may pledge me to profound secrecy if you like. I'm dying to know what it is they do in the morning!"

Hilda was gaining back her nerve. "They run away and have breakfast together at the hotel! That's what they do, Aunt Marjie!"

"Oh, how charming!"

"Yes, Aunt Marjie, they've done it every year since they were married!"

"They have? Well, now, I call that pure romance! How coy! How it must carry them back! I think I'd really like to know the Goodmans. There isn't such a great deal of pure romance available nowadays. People are too self-conscious."

"You'll meet them tonight," was the hope Mrs. Needham held out. And then, while her husband began carving fresh slices of lamb, and since the subject of the Midsummer Roast seemed about exhausted, Anna went chattily on: "Marjie, I must say I like Mr. O'Donnell real well."

"Speaking of pure romance?" her sister sparklingly interpolated. "Yes," she continued, "Barrett's a good chap. Used to be a bit egregious, you know, in the old days. But he's mellowed wonderfully. I—I'll let you in on a tremendous secret," she added, with mock breathlessness, and addressing herself to

Alfred behind her hand. "If he should happen to ask me again—I'm only saying *if*, you understand. . . ." She finished eloquently in pantomime.

The Rev. Needham dropped his fork, but quickly recovered it and went on eating. He had just told himself that no matter what new monstrosity his sister-in-law might enunciate, he would magnificently let it pass. He would not appear to notice it. He was a clergyman. There was a certain dignity to be preserved in spite of everything. But good heavens, she had said it behind her hand!

"Oh-h-h!" said Hilda. She giggled.

"Barrett *is* an old peach," continued Miss Whitcom quite brazenly. "He's stood by me through everything!"

The Rev. Needham nearly dropped his fork again. That awful word. Everything! And she could be so damnably cool about it! Was he narrow or old-fashioned to feel the way he did? Yet would not feeling any other way be simply debauching oneself? Ah, if, instead of his changing his own point of view, she might somehow drop off into a deep, painless slumber. . . . And never wake. . . .

"Well, then," said Anna, who had kept perfectly her head, and was also rather thrilled, "I hope he will, Marjie."

Marjory looked dreamily off through the open window. A few birches caught the evening light mistily, and were dyed a delicate pink all along their slim white trunks. Would he? Ah, of course! And

yet. . . . Well—hm? . . . If not, why . . . . She mentally tossed her head. But what she told herself was not quite so haughty: "In that case I could hardly blame anybody but myself. . . ."

By this time it might be said that the edge, at least, of hunger was taken off. All had eaten quite heartily, except Louise. But even Louise, though she dimly felt this was not as it should be, had found it possible to do at least a little nibbling. Of course it would be out of the question to expect her to eat like the rest. It was another case of Richard. Probably she would not eat just like the rest for a good while to come. Still, she would manage to keep going. One always did that in real life.

The Rev. Needham, however, was at length coming definitely to notice things. Louise, some more of the lamb? No? Surely more of the creamed carrots? But you're so fond of them! Ah, yes. There were sharp and anxious glances in the direction of this baffling elder daughter. She wasn't eating right. And when any of the Needhams didn't eat right, you could be very sure there was something wrong with the heart.

But now, anxious paternal orbs, let your troubled gaze shift to another plate—the next plate nearer your own. Oh, man of God, what cheer? Barry, another slice? Ah, but never you mind that—no one stops at a second helping here! No more potatoes, either? Tz, tz! Oh, reverend sir, what a load to fetch back to your expectant flock in the fall! Oh,

if anything should happen now—now, just as life was becoming so kind! Oh, now—and those prickles in the heels occurring with less and less frequency, even despite the upsetting presence of Marjory! To have something go wrong—at his time of life. . . . To find the world running all to sixes and sevens. . . .

Oh, it must be a wild and overwhelming fancy, nothing more than that! Barry (he rambled wildly in his mind) for mercy's sake more carrots? And aloud: "Just a few more, Barry?" *Good!* No, no, one hasn't heaped them up. One only wants to be sure. And if there is no absolute assurance in this hard world, one so beset can be forgiven for taking refuge behind appearances—even behind appearances of one's own manufacture, in an extremity like this! Yes, by hook or by crook one must contrive to keep the best foot foremost!

Barry, as a matter of fact, was doing pretty well and feeling pretty wretched. He had got through the afternoon coolly enough on a kind of momentum generated partly by the decision that he had simply been a fool to dream such dreams, and partly by that hopeful, wise, desperate little word of counsel, that fine word, patience. But here, all at once, was a pang of reaction. All the old, warm, wistful love came rushing back. The ancient dreams of home and wife and children returned to taunt and torture him. Only last night, on the deck of the steamer, with the moon so soft on the sea—ah, only last night.

. . . How he had let himself go! How he had even pictured things: the fireplace here, perhaps the piano there. . . . And how his cigar had gone out, and he hadn't noticed. But now he was sitting beside her at her father's table, and he did not know whether she loved him or not. And in his pocket was a box with a ring inside it—a ring for which there might never be any use.

Mrs. Needham noticed, too. But Louise had already explained that she had a headache. The mother did not suspect that there was anything necessarily portentous in the air, and her heart beat placidly enough. Her life seemed settling and settling. The current grew more and more tranquil. She had times of feeling so kind of still.

Later the talk centred in Arizona.

Barry glanced at Louise, and found her, as it happened, gazing sadly, quizzically, and with some abstraction at him. He looked away at once, trembling a little; and he carried on the theme:

"Of course Arizona strikes people in different ways. Some find the flatness and the sand depressing."

"Is it sand all over?" asked Hilda.

"Oh, dear no!" replied Miss Whitcom, with a vehemence which served to remind them all that she had been a pioneer in the cactus candy business and knew what she was talking about.

Even the Rev. Needham contributed something to

his younger daughter's enlightenment. "There are lots of trees along the irrigation ditches. Barry, what kind of trees are they? I never can seem to remember."

"Cottonwood, mostly," he answered. "The foliage is a very delicate green."

"Oh, it must be lovely!" sighed Hilda, who romantically saw herself walking along beside Leslie beneath an everlasting row of the most beautiful trees anybody could possibly imagine. "How I should love to go out there!"

"Yes," mused Miss Whitcom, "and we mustn't forget the broad fields of alfalfa—so dark—the very greenest green in all the world."

Barry nodded slowly. "Yes, the river valleys are always quite fertile. Then comes the great Arizona desert, with cacti and mesquite and greenwood and sage. And beyond all that"—he had begun a little monotonously, but came at length to speak in a rather rapt way—"beyond all that, the dim blue of the distance, the lonely peaks of the mountains...."

"Grand old mountains!" added Miss Whitcom.

And it was odd, and no doubt sentimental, but the mountains all at once reminded her somehow of O'Donnell. Yes, O'Donnell was something like a mountain. Her heart quickened a little.

"Oh, I know I should just love it!" cried Hilda. And then she asked, in her almost breathless manner: "Are there any birds in Arizona?"

"Birds?" repeated Barry, a little abstractedly.

"Birds? Oh, yes—all through the irrigated districts. There are orchards, you know. It's a fine sight to see them in full bloom. And the trees are alive with birds—meadow larks and mocking birds, mostly. And there are blackbirds, too. They sing in a wonderful chorus. And almost everywhere you'll hear the little Mexican doves."

"Oh, I remember the doves!" cried Louise suddenly, forgetting her wretchedness.

He looked at her wistfully and solemnly. "Some people say the doves have the sweetest song of all. There's a very plaintive note—you remember?"

"Yes," she whispered thickly, avoiding his eyes.

The breath of Fate seemed faintly to animate her having remembered the little Mexican doves. "I think," he said, "they have the saddest song of any of the birds."

5

A REMARK, dreadful yet tantalizing in the vistas it opened up, was overheard by the Rev. Needham as he was coming out on to the screened porch. It was a remark which set on foot an increasingly turbulent desire to know, unequivocally and without expurgation, just what had been the nature of his sister-in-law's life on the distracting island of Tahulamaji.

Mrs. Needham had retired to the kitchen for a final fling with Eliza about breakfast, leaving the minister alone in the living room with his daughter. Miss Whitcom and Mr. Barry had passed out on to the porch, and Louise had dropped down in a nice shadowy corner with a book—just as young ladies naturally and invariably do after dinner, when the light is beginning to fail, and their lover is waiting for them outside.

The Rev. Needham, whose suspicions had already been rather alarmingly roused, now felt sure not all was well. Why should Louise behave like this if all were well? And even Barry—Barry wasn't, of course, one of those romantic fellows who would always be sighing and rolling their eyes; but there were subtler manifestations. . . . They had gone

walking together in the afternoon—thank God! There was that much to cling to. Yes, thank heaven they had done that much anyway!

But the Rev. Needham was so full of perplexity that he hardly knew what to do next. He told himself, in desperation, that everything *must*, in reality, be all right—rather much as his daughter had assured herself on the train that all must work out for the best: her best. He knew, as a matter of fact, that this was not quite honest persuasion. But it helped. Oh, it was a very present help. To tell the truth, it sufficed to carry him quickly out of his daughter's presence. In his heart, the minister knew that the issue ought to be faced at once. Yes, he ought to call Louise over on to his knee, just as in the old days, before any of the unhappy love troubles began, and ask her to tell him what had gone wrong. But he didn't call her over. Instead he began humming in a perfectly unconcerned manner, and strolled outside.

It was just as he reached the door that the Rev. Needham overheard the all but blood-curdling remark.

"You must realize," Miss Whitcom was saying to his daughter's fiancé, "that it's much too hot there to wear any clothes!"

It being patently too late to turn back, the clergyman came on; somehow reached a chair. He sat down quickly and began rocking. He rocked helplessly, yet withal in a faintly ominous way—perhaps,

deeper still, with a movement of guilty curiosity: for after all he was but human, poor man.

The sun had just dipped, and the sky and the sea were alive with the fire of this august departure. A wraith-like distribution of cloud still received direct beams and glowed like a bit of magic dream-stuff; but the lower world had to rest content now with reflected glory—a sheen of softening brightness which would grow steadily thicker and thicker, like quandary in the clergyman's breast, till at length the light was all gone and darkness had settled across the sea and the sand. Ah, peaceful eventide! Good-bye, sweet day! But the heart of the minister was all full of horrid little quick jerks and a settling mugginess.

The conversation his appearance had served to interrupt did not continue as it had evidently begun. Yet even at its worst it appeared to have constituted merely a laughing digression from the major theme, which had to do with the perfectly proper topic of dry-farming. No one would think of calling the topic of dry-farming improper. But the tenor of the talk which succeeded the minister's arrival in their midst did not, for all its unimpeachable correctness, serve to diminish the poignancy of that awful phrase: too hot to wear any clothes!

"Mr. Barry," she explained to her brother-in-law, "has been telling me a lot of interesting things about the sorghums."

Alfred Needham cleared his throat—just as he

always did, for instance, before ascending the pulpit on Sunday—and nodded. But he was not thinking about the sorghums—just as sometimes, it is to be feared, in the very act of coming out of the vestry, and with the eyes of the congregation upon him, he failed to keep his mind entirely on the sermon he was about to deliver.

"It seems they've made enormous strides since my day," she went on. "Mr. Barry, how many varieties did you say are now possible?"

"Well," he replied solemnly, his eyes large with helpless unhappiness, "the sorghums now include common or sweet sorghum, milo maize, Kaffir corn—and of course broom corn. These have become standard crops, and we're introducing them more and more into the southern district." He rocked a trifle self-consciously. All three rocked a moment in silence.

"There's considerably less rainfall down there," commented the Rev. Needham.

The statement had been carefully equipped with earmarks of the interrogative, so that, should it happen to prove incorrect, refutation would take the form of a simple answer to an ingenuous and perfectly natural question. The Rev. Needham found it urgent to keep his inflections always slightly interrogative. There was even a sly, sneaking hint of the useful question mark throughout the reverend man's theology. Ghastly as the thing must sound spoken right out, it is really doubtful whether the Rev. Needham would be caught altogether napping were the

entire Bible suddenly to be proved spurious! Of course when Barry admitted that there *was* less rainfall in the southern part, then the minister rocked with subtly renewed purpose, slapping the arms of his chair exactly as an acknowledged authority on rainfall might be expected to do. But of course it was all ever so much subtler than this makes it appear. It was infinitely more delicate than any mere I-told-you-so attitude.

"You know," continued Barry, who felt an unpleasant thickness in his throat, "the sorghums have to be able to withstand a great deal of drought. They roll up their leaves and seem to sleep for months at a time; and when the rain comes again they revive quickly and make rapid strides."

Inside the cottage sat Louise. She was huddled miserably over a book. She was not reading the book, though it chanced to be a very absorbing historical novel. It is hard to conceive of a young lady's not reading such a work with avidity and even breathlessness, under the circumstances. But to be perfectly accurate, Louise hadn't even opened the historical novel. It simply lay in her lap, and she was huddled over it. Her eyes were dry. She was utterly miserable. And just outside, in the full, fresh sweetness of diminishing dayshine, sat the man who had come all this way to put a ring on her finger. He was sitting out there in the romantic richness of the tinted evening, and he was talking about the sorghums!

Oh, a wise plant is the sorghum. When there is a drought it rolls up its leaves and waits till it is time for the refreshment of another rain. The sorghum knows well how to plan and bide its time. The *sorghum* would not give itself too easily. . . .

Out on the rustic bench which her dear father had so laboriously constructed sat Hilda. She was listening for steps in the sand. She would know whose steps they were when they drew close. It was growing quite dusky underneath the trees. The stars would soon be appearing. There had been a slight breeze all the afternoon, but it had died away; and on the beach the tiny waves were whispering that it had passed that way and was now still. The trees stood very quiet, but occasionally a squirrel would whisk by overhead. The squirrels, however, were turning in for the night now, and soon there would be no stir left save only the night stir of the woods. Far off sounded at intervals the shouts of young childern—children younger than Hilda, and unfettered as yet by any sweet obligation of sitting very breathless, listening for steps in the sand.

"How lovely everything is!" thought Hilda.

When she saw Leslie she ran out to meet him—no mooning pretense at not having heard.

"Oh, Les, why don't you light it?"

He carried a Japanese lantern and was swinging it about in a very reckless way.

"Shall I?" he asked. "Now?"

"Oh, yes! It isn't quite dark yet, but it will be so much fun!"

"The candle's pretty short, Hilda. Do you think it will last?"

"Let me see." They bent their heads eagerly over the paper lantern.

"It isn't very long, is it Les? I guess we'd better put in a new one. There are lots of them at the cottage."

And before he could protest she was flying off.

On the screened porch she found the entire household assembled. Mrs. Needham had completed her session with Eliza and was now pleasantly rocking. Ah, there was a rhythm in her rocking—especially of late years. It was the sort of rhythm the vers librists have so entirely broken away from. It was a rocking which rarely went slower or faster. Perhaps it was the Homeric hexametre. Or it was stately blank verse, with maybe the quaint rhyming couplets of Crabbe and Cowper. No one could ever think of mistaking it for Edgar Lee Masters!

Louise had come out also. Hilda, as she flew by and on into the cottage, saw her sister sitting beside Lynndal Barry on a rocking settee. There was, as a matter of fact, not a single stationary piece of furniture on the porch. To Anna Needham, rocking was pleasant and even actually profitable. To her husband—well, to the Rev. Needham it seemed a kind of muscular necessity. And the girls had always been used to it. So all the chairs rocked.

Aunt Marjie sighed briefly as Hilda ran by. Boy-crazy. Well, life wasn't made for waiting and and working alone. Somehow, this sea air—these lustrous, still nights—were stealing away her resistance. Yes, O'Donnell was a kind of mountain. And yet, curiously enough, he was only a travelling man, too, just as he had always been. Yes, he travelled for Babbit & Babbit. But she would go home to him at last. She would put her head on his shoulder, if he would let her, just like a silly young thing. Suddenly she saw her life as a restless confusion of ambitions and beginnings. Oh, to have spent it so! To have waited as long as this! To have been so afraid of giving herself too easily. . . .

Hilda came running out again. She clutched a new candle in her hand. Her eyes were quite wonderful.

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Needham, appearing a little bewildered by this cyclonic going and coming.

"He's out there; we're going to start now!"

There was just sufficient coherence to bring Miss Whitcom to her feet. Always impulsive, she stepped to the screen door and thence down on to the path.

"Hilda!"

"Yes, Aunt Marjie?"

"You're going to light O'Donnell through to the Point?"

"Yes, Aunt Marjie."

Well, be sure you don't lose yourselves!" No, even Marjory, with her amazing retrospect of brass, did not quite dare to say: "Don't lose *him!*" And yet, so far as her heart was concerned, it really amounted to that.

The last thing Hilda heard, as she sped off, was the patient voice of Lynndal Barry. The minister had asked him another question about the sorghums.

"Yes," Barry was saying, "there are about as many varieties of Kaffir corn and milo maize as of the saccharine sorghums. Only a few have been tested in the South: red Kaffir corn, black hulled white Kaffir, standard milo maize, and dwarf milo maize. But we intend—"

Hilda, skipping with happiness, heard no more.

6

THE procession through the forest of Betsey was a very romantic affair. First came Hilda and Leslie, the latter carrying the lighted Japanese lantern swung over his shoulder. And behind them walked Mr. O'Donnell, like some great monarch; and he must indeed, just then, have felt himself at least the king of all travelling men. What would his colleagues of the grip think if they could see him now? Had any of them, for all their store of timetables and their samples and routes and customers, ever marched through so royal a forest, on such a night, lighted by young love and a gay paper lantern?

Over the hills and through the valleys of Betsey! It was a wonderful lark. Of course it wouldn't last. Real larks never did. He would go back to his grim bag of samples, and she would go back to her beloved Tahulamaji. There would be thousands of miles between them once more, and life would settle back into the uneventful dog-trot which had become the established gait. But tonight! Tonight he was parading the forest of Betsey like a very king, and his way was lighted by a bright paper lantern which danced at the end of a bough.

"Now," he thought slyly, "if I were a poet. . . ." However, being no poet, but only a travelling man in the employ of Babbit & Babbit, our friend simply walked along, like the plain mortal he was; and was content, if with a sigh, things should be as they were. "Ah, this is fine!" he would exclaim in his quiet way. And Hilda, for all her heart was so richly moved, would merely reply: "Yes, we like it."

It had been agreed upon that O'Donnell should be led directly to the scene of the Assembly Roast instead of being brought all the way round to Beachcrest first. The Needhams, Miss Whitcom, and Barry were to walk up the beach, when it was time.

It was at length about as dark as it ever gets in moonlight season. The moon had not yet risen, but would be coming up soon. The Rev. Needham suggested that it was time to start.

Miss Whitcom was on her feet at once. There followed quite a little flurry about wraps. The Rev. Needham and Barry strolled on ahead down to the beach. They walked slowly, and the ladies were to overtake them. Both men were smoking cigars, the ministerial supply seeming happily inexhaustible. If one's faith might be as inexhaustible!

Being a little ill at ease, they talked of obvious things: the broadness of the beach just here, the firmness of the sand, its pleasant crunch under the feet.

"We tried to have a board walk down from the cottage," observed the Rev. Needham, "but every winter

the sand drifted all over it and buried it, so we had to give up the idea." He was wondering nervously whether Barry would seize this occasion to ask for his daughter's hand.

"You really don't need a walk," replied his guest. "It's an agreeable change from the city this way."

"Yes—yes, it's a change."

There was a short, awkward pause. Then Barry remarked. "You've got an ideal location here."

And the minister answered: "Yes, we like it."

They trudged on a little way in silence.

"There certainly are a lot of stars out tonight," commented Barry, transferring his gaze rather abruptly from the sands to the heavens.

"Um—yes. Yes, there are a great many. And there will be a full moon, later on."

"Yes, I know. The moon was wonderful last night on the lake. I sat out on deck a long time,"

"You said you had a good trip across, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes—perfectly smooth."

Another silence—an ominous desperate silence.

"Well," quoth the Rev. Needham, turning around and peering back, "I wonder if they're not coming?"

"I think I see them coming now across the sand," remarked Barry.

"Yes—yes, I believe I do, too," the other agreed.

"That's Louise in the white dress."

"Yes, that's Louise."

It wasn't long before the ladies overtook them. The tension was at once both relieved and heightened. Anna Needham claimed her husband's arm, Louise walked beside Barry, and Miss Whitcom walked alone with her thoughts. However, the groups were not isolated. Yes, there was safety in numbers. Single encounters began to be desperately unpleasant.

What was the matter? In Anna's day, young folks had been given, she remembered, to wandering significantly off by themselves on such rare nights as this. But Louise and Lynndal kept close. Anna was troubled about this—even whispered about it to her husband as they walked along. Alfred started and began to talk about something else. They ought to face this thing. They ought to face it squarely and with courage. But Alfred couldn't. He told himself they must be only imagining things.

They passed the lighthouse, so shadowy and gaunt itself, yet with so beaming an eye! Adjoining the tower was the keeper's residence. There were lights in some of the rooms. A child was calling. A dog was sniffing about. He was quite used to resorters, and did not even bark as the party approached and passed the premises. Louise stooped to pat the dog's head. Barry said: "Hello, sir!" The dog wagged his tail slowly, but did not follow them away from the house. He had learned all life's lessons in puppyhood. He would never stray. What a grand thing, never to stray!

When they were rounding the final curve of the Point separating them from the rendezvous, Mrs. Needham cried: "Oh, look—they're lighting it already!"

The cone-shaped pile was visible, and fire was leaping all about the base. Flame shot up quickly to the very peak, and thence on up, higher and higher, toward the stars.

There was quite a crowd assembled about the fire when the people from Beachcrest arrived. O'Donnell and his delightful escort arrived from another direction at almost the same moment. Then they all sat around in the sand, and kept jumping up to introduce and be introduced. Naturally the Needhams knew everybody on the Point; and it was always quite a thing to have guests. Here were the Goodmans, smiling hosts to the entire assembly. Had they not started the thing long ago when their married life was in its springtime? Ah, the Goodmans! Miss Whitcom remarked afterward that she felt as though she were shaking hands with royalty. "It honestly reminded me," she said, "of my first meeting with Queen Tess!"

In the excitement, of course the roasting sticks had been forgotten, and of course Hilda insisted upon running all the way back with Leslie to Beachcrest after them. By the time the sticks were there, the fire had flared itself into a condition inviting the approach of wienies and marshmallows. A ring of resorters hovered round the fire with sticks held hope-

fully out and faces shielded by an arm. Naturally there were some mishaps. Some one, by deftly turning and turning, would coax a marshmallow to the point of the most golden perfection, only to have it plump dismally down in the sand at last. Then there would be a chorus of sympathy and disappointment from a group of sitters, each of whom had perhaps more or less hoped to be favoured with the delicious smoking confection. Or else it would be a frankfurter that plumped. But there never was a roast without tragedies.

And everywhere romped the children. Sometimes they would throw themselves on to their stomachs and begin ambitiously digging in the sand toward water. Then they would leap and chase each other, or they would go about thrusting fallen faggots back into the fiery heart of the blaze.

The provision baskets stood hospitably open. In one might be discovered a wealth of cool, slippery frankfurters; in another heaps of split and buttered buns; in still another dill pickles, a pot of mustard. And of course there were always marshmallows. Some preferred marshmallows to frankfurters and some preferred frankfurters to marshmallows. But the majority ate ravenously of both alike, displaying little or no preference.

The eastern sky grew lighter and lighter. The trees stood out mysterious and very black against it.

"Look, look!" cried the children.

For the moon was rising now.

The young boys grew restive. Their stomachs were simply closed to the incursion of any more refreshment; it was a pity, no doubt, but full was full. The boys began enlarging their area of prowess. There was a great sand bluff inland a short way, where a rift in the hills cut a deep, barren gash across the face of the forest. The boys crept far up the bluff and then leapt out, down and down.

The east was luminous, and the great moon crept higher and higher. When the boys leapt, their bodies were silhouetted against her bright disc. They would appear out of the shadow of nothing, poise a moment, leap into space, disappear.

"Well," observed Barry, in some surprise, "I see you've brought a book along."

She had really forgotten the book was in her lap, as she sat huddled over it so miserably in the cottage living room after dinner. When she had gone out on to the porch afterward she had carried it with her automatically, and so had brought it all the way to the roast without thinking. Louise had a grimly whimsical feeling that she couldn't get away from the book. "If I'd only thrown it into the harbour this morning!" she thought. But to him she merely replied, a manufactured gaiety edging the words without lightening them: "Oh, yes—it's a book I picked up by chance." She handled it carelessly, and her quick glance shot to a distant group. Leslie was lying stretched out in the sand, his chin in his hands. He was looking up at Hilda, who appeared

to be recounting something of great interest. Louise felt her face go hot with jealousy. "I—I don't know much about it," she went on, flapping the cover of the book listlessly back and forth. "It was recommended to me by some one who had read it."

"What is the name?" Barry asked politely.

She held the book up in the firelight, flaunting it in the face of the man who had come so far with his love and his brave little ring. It was the darkest hour of her pilotless groping.

Leslie's laugh rang. The little group took it up. Then Leslie himself appeared to become the centre of interest. He began telling a story which involved a great many gestures. At one stage he even jumped up and turned a cartwheel, and one of the girls in the crowd exclaimed: "Can't you just see it?"

"Oh, what shall I do?" thought Louise, fighting her tears.

The moon climbed slowly up the sky, and the young boys, one after another, with loud shrieks of joy, silhouetted themselves darkly against her gleaming face.

And then the speech making began.

The Rev. Goodman led off. He had something in the nature of a set speech for the occasion, which varied surprisingly little from year to year. It bade the guests welcome, always in the same felicitous terms, and contained the same allusions to the salubriousness of the climate, the unmatchable beauty of their Point. Alluding to God's Great Out-of-Doors,

the Rev. Goodman would invariably employ the same grand gesture.

"And now," he concluded, "I am sure, dear friends, we feel a gratitude in our hearts to the Father of All Goodness, who has guided our footsteps," et cetera, et cetera. "And may we all bow our heads with the Rev. Needham, and join him in prayer."

The Rev. Goodman sat down and the Rev. Needham scrambled to his feet. He closed his eyes very tight and prayed quite loud—as though defying Marjory to prevail against him here. It was the next thing to being right in the pulpit! But he felt her gazing at him in that shrewd way of hers which seemed saying: "Alfred, have you really got truth in your heart?" What did Marjory mean by looking at him that way? What right had she to question his faith and to speak of truth?

It was really a very good prayer, though perhaps just a little more earnest than the occasion actually required. When the prayer was finished, he sat down. (Naturally there was no applause.) All the other speakers would be applauded, but no applause lightened the sitting down of the Rev. Needham. However, there was a general stir in the camp, just as there is in church when backs, wearied with the Sabbath bending, straighten cheerfully for another seven days of sin.

And then the Rev. Goodman, who was the official

toastmaster, jumped up and told a humorous story, which every one had heard before; after which he turned to the Rev. Blake and asked him to recite *The House By the Side of the Road,* a very great favourite at the Point. Then the congregation sang that cheering and beautiful hymn, *Rock of Ages,* under cover of which most of the boys escaped and ran violent races up and down the beach. Then the host told another moderately humorous story, in which he very cleverly incorporated something about the brother clergyman upon whom he meant to call for the next selection. This clergyman (who hailed from Dubuque, Iowa), not to be outdone, scored heavily by telling a humorous story he had learnt off from *The Ladies' Home Journal,* but which in the telling he so miraculously manipulated that the Rev. Goodman became its hero! There always was a vast amount of pleasant playfulness at these Assembly Roasts. Later on the congregation, sitting, sang that sublimely joyous hymn called *Jesus, Lover of My Soul.* Since there was no judicious organist at hand to speed things up, the singing was inclined to sag, and one half of the camp finished a little bit behind the other. But this was a very small matter indeed, because, as every one knows, it is the spirit that counts most, especially at such times. Innumerable other speakers, many of them purely secular, were called upon. And Mrs. Goodman, who was quite an elocutionist, read a little story which only the innermost circle

could hear. And Miss Whitcom nudged her friend. They slipped away and strolled along the beach together.

"I thought I'd rescue you, Barrett," she said.

"But I was immensly enjoying myself," he smilingly protested.

"Yes, I shouldn't wonder—especially the singing! You know, I was so desperately afraid they might call upon me—just as a curiosity, you know—and how I should have shocked them!"

"You think so?"

"Why, of course. I never open my mouth without shocking somebody or other. I don't really set out to do it. I simply don't seem able to help myself."

"You don't shock me."

"Perhaps not—any more."

"But you know you never really did."

"Never?"

"No. At worst you only opened my eyes."

"Well, Barrett," she said, after a short silence, I think I've always rather felt that: that you understood, deep down—that you weren't quite shockable, in fact."

"Yes," he said meditatively. They strolled along, saying nothing more for a little time.

At length she asked: "Do you remember the time we swam for the Allenhurst medal?"

"Of course I do," he nodded.

"You remember how even we were—how we outdistanced all the others?"

He smiled queerly. "They hadn't a chance!"

"Right-O, Barrett. We knew how to stroke in those days! Well," she continued after a moment, "and you haven't forgotten how I won the race—and why?"

"A sudden cramp—I thought I was done for!"

"Oh, no, my friend." They were both smiling. "Time has played tricks with your memory. It wasn't a cramp. Now think, think *hard*. You went lazy at the finish. And so how could I help pulling in ahead in spite of myself?"

"Marjory, I—"

"Be not forsworn, my friend. Let's agree that you went lazy at the finish. After all these years, can't we? It was a singular thing," she went on, half gravely and half smilingly. "You know I was just at the age. . . . Well, it had a most singular effect upon me. Yes, I may say it altered the whole course of my life, Barrett." She laughed softly.

"Great heavens, Marjory, you don't honestly mean . . . !"

"Well, you see, I was one of the first of the 'new' women, and I just simply rebelled. That was all. You haven't forgotten how I sent the medal back to you?"

He looked quite serious. "I know," he said softly. "I was stupid about it for a long time.

There didn't seem to be any sense in your sending it back. In fact. . . ." He hesitated.

"Do let's be perfectly frank!" she invited, with another short laugh.

"Well, I thought it a wilful and childish attitude to take. I didn't want them to say I'd beaten a woman. We were still living on the fringe of chivalry, you know, when it was more important to walk on the proper side of a woman and tip your hat to her at a certain angle than to give her the vote. I was brought up in a delightful Victorian atmosphere, where it wasn't considered the thing even to beat a woman at tennis, if you could decently help it."

"Ah, yes!" cried Marjory. "Just think of it! But gradually you grew wiser, Barrett—you and the world."

"Yes," he muttered, "I and the world."

"You came to see . . . ."

"Yes, I came at last to see that you can't go lazy at the finish any more. I told you, and I meant it, that at last I've capitulated—capitulated at every point."

They walked on a little way in the moonlight, close to the waves. All at once a bold thrill of tenderness came on him. He drew the woman into his arms. She responded slowly. Afterward she professed to be not quite sure whether they had kissed.

But there was a witness. Oh, yes—there was a witness who could emphatically and joyfully testify that they did kiss, and that they kissed more than

once. The witness, of course, was our ubiquitous little pagan god, who had abandoned at least a half dozen most promising cases at the roast to chase for a moment down the beach after this pair of obdurate mortals who had held off for twenty years.

7

AT about ten o'clock the Rev. Needham took out his watch and thought it was time he and his little party set their faces homeward. Mrs. Needham had been talking gentle gossip with Mrs. Blake and the wife of the minister from Dubuque; but she got up at once and obediently took her husband's arm.

"We go to bed early at Beachcrest," she explained. They went to bed early in town, for that matter, though the full truth went uncommunicated.

"Where are the girls?" demanded the Rev. Needham, looking anxiously round.

Louise came up hurriedly, followed by Barry. "Are you starting home now, papa?" she asked, with what sounded strangely like eagerness.

"Well, we thought we'd just be starting along. It's —it's not late yet, you know. We'll just slip on ahead and get the cottage lighted."

"I think we'll go along now too."

"Oh, I wouldn't hurry. The fire's quite good yet."

"Lynndal is tired," she insisted. "He didn't sleep more than a couple of hours on the boat." And she gave him a very complex glance in which there was something whisperingly like an element of tenderness.

"Well," capitulated Mrs. Needham.

But Louise was only one daughter. Where was Hilda?

Where indeed? Where *was* she?

Anxious eyes explored the assembled company. Most of the young people had mysteriously made off, some this way and some that, but all alike into the friendly embrace of the darkness which lay so thick beyond the glow of the fire. Where was Hilda?

"I think I saw her with the lad—is it Leslie?" said Lynndal Barry.

"Oh—Leslie," repeated Mrs. Needham.

"You didn't notice which way they went?" asked the minister.

"No, I'm afraid I didn't."

Then Louise came to the rescue. She pointed miserably, yet also with a faint, new fact-facing grimness, toward the lake.

"They haven't taken out the *canoe* . . . !"

Alfred Needham was horror struck.

"It's perfectly calm, papa," Louise reminded him dryly.

Then, indeed, they saw the canoe, on the moonlit water. Both Leslie and Hilda were paddling. But they were not exactly paddling toward the shore.

"She knows it's not allowed, out like this at all hours of the night!" cried the minister.

But his wife reassured him in her gentle way. "Alf, I wouldn't worry. Leslie will look out for her."

Louise lowered her head. Then she moved almost impreceptibly closer to Lynndal. At length the homeward march was begun. But the Rev. Needham stopped again suddenly, looking at his wife in a helpless way.

"Anna, *where's your sister?*"

"Dear me!" cried Anna Needham. "We were starting right off without her!"

"Is that Miss Whitcom?" asked Barry.

"Who?"

"Where?"

"The lady just ahead, coming this way."

It was true. There was a lady approaching along the beach. But she was with a man, and the man....

"Alf!" whispered Anna, gripping her husband's arm.

"Well?"

"Oh—*look!*"

"What is it, Anna?"

She murmured in almost an ecstasy: "Why, he's got his arm right round her waist!"

The awful intelligence that this was indeed Marjory, and that a man had his arm around her waist, smote the minister's consciousness with peculiar and climatic force.

Hilda and Leslie took their own good time about coming in off the lake. It was so wonderful out there in the moonlight.

"I've had a perfectly grand time!" she told him,

her voice thrilling richly with conviction. She knew she had had a grand time, and whatever might be the sequel when she faced her parents, the grandness would never, never diminish.

They ascended the slight sand elevation and reached the steps leading up to the porch. Moonlight patched and patterned the steps. They did not go any farther.

Hilda sat down, drawing her knees and chin together, while Leslie whistled softly.

"Will your father be mad?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" the girl exclaimed, with the full and emphatic authority of one who is gravely in doubt. "Why?" she added. "It isn't late, is it?"

Leslie pulled out his watch. "N-o-o. Only twenty after eleven."

"Twenty *after* eleven? Twenty after *eleven!* Oh, my goodness! I didn't have any idea it was so late. It seemed as though we were only out there a couple of minutes!"

"It did to me, too," admitted Leslie.

The lateness of the hour, however, appeared to exert no immediate influence upon either his recognition of the wisdom of departure or hers of withdrawal to bed. Leslie swung back and forth, clinging to a slender birch tree which grew quite close to the cottage. Its silver leaves crashed gently together, as though a breeze were thrusting its way through.

"I could simply sit out here all night!" Hilda declared.

Leslie admitted he could too. Presently he did sit down. He sat down beside Hilda, but, as before, one step below her. It was certainly a lovely night. His head somehow found her knee; then Eros could hardly contain himself! Hilda ran her fingers very lightly through his hair. They did not bother to talk much.

At length he asked: "Shall we go out after raspberries tomorrow? Would you like to?"

"Oh, Les—that would be lots of fun!"

"All right."

"Shall we take a lunch so we won't have to hurry?"

"Good idea."

"What time will you come, Les?"

"What time do you want me?"

"Oh—I don't know."

"Right after breakfast?"

"Oh, yes!" Her answer to this question held no slightest inflection of doubt.

"What time do you have breakfast?"

"Never later than eight o'clock, and it only takes me a minute to eat!"

Leslie appeared to have forgotten all about going back to the city, after all....

There was another warm silence. The boy had no idea of starting for his own cottage, nor had Hilda any idea of going to bed. It didn't, for some strange reason, occur to either that the parent Needhams might be waiting up in there, and that the minister, harassed over dim prospects of ruin perceived in the

relationship of his daughter and the man who handled the Western interests, was attaining an attitude of really appalling austerity. No, they didn't bother their spoony young heads about any of these things, until all at once the cottage door opened, letting out upon them a flood of light from the living room.

"Hello, papa!" cried Hilda, guiltily and very affectionately. She jumped up.

The Rev. Needham did not say much out on the porch; but when Leslie had crept off, after hurriedly squeezing the girl's hand, and Hilda had been marshalled within, the law was laid down with unusual vigour. Mrs. Needham took it all rather more quietly, primarily because she did not share, in its full poignancy, her husband's alarm over Louise. Of course she was concerned. But the poise of climax was beginning to assert itself. No doubt tomorrow, if a reign of chaos really did set in, Mrs. Needham would rule over the turmoil like a very judge. She would become dominant, as when she went to rescue her daughter from the Potomac. It was perhaps her only complex.

Hilda had just been sent up to bed, rather subdued, but in her heart immensely radiant, when Marjory arrived home. O'Donnell wanted to hang around awhile, but she wouldn't let him. No, she positively refused to linger any longer in the moonlight. She reproved herself a little. She reproved him a little, too. They had already been quite romantic enough

for one night. And she hustled him off with a lack of ceremony which went with her years and her temperament. All the same, he managed to steal a glancing kiss. And Eros—who I forgot to say had remained in hiding out there—Eros told himself that this was infinitely better for his purposes than a mere handshake!

When he had gone, she sat down on the steps alone, for a moment. It was so wonderful—life was—and the night. She watched the moon declining over a just-troubled sea. Then abruptly she became conscious of voices in the cottage living room.

"Now, your sister!"

"Well, Alf?"

"*She's still out!*"

"Oh, Marjory knows the way."

"But at such an hour!"

"It's only a quarter to twelve, Alf."

"I know how the Point will be talking tomorrow!"

"Alf, I—"

"Oh—I've nothing to say. No, Anna, I realize she's your sister. But I must tell you what I think." And he was back once more on the topic that so turbulently absorbed him. "I think Marjory has been led into an unfortunate way of living. She's always run so free and never cared what people thought or said. I really don't know how the Point is going to take her." And after a moment's pause, during which the minister could be heard pacing up and down: "Anna, what do we know about the nature of

her life in Tahulamaji? Has she told you anything definitely about that? No. But she's hinted...." He paced on, and presently added: "Now here she is, just back; and the very first thing she does is walk all over with a man's arm round her!"

Miss Whitcom abandoned the wonderful night. When she entered, her sister smiled and brightened generally. But her brother-in-law seemed rather taken off his feet.

Marjory wanted to make the minister feel perfectly at home, so she sat down and began rocking cosily.

"How snug you're fixed here!" she murmured. "How happy you ought to be, Alfred, in your little nest! Ah, it's fine to be in the bosom of a family again. You know, I feel somehow as though I'd come back from an absence of nearly a lifetime. It's a curious feeling, to come back like this. Like a sort of prodigal, Alfred—just fancy! But I *did* have to go away," she pleaded earnestly. "In the beginning, it was quite necessary! You see there were such a lot of things I wanted to find out, and I felt from the very first—Anna, you remember how I used to talk to you about life, and all that?—well, I somehow felt I shouldn't find out anything just sitting in the front parlour with a family album spread open on my lap. You see, it wasn't what the others were like that I wanted to be like, and it wasn't what all the others had done that I wanted to do in the world. So I broke away. Yes, the prodigal left, to roam far and wide. Now that we're chatting here all snug, I

may tell you, Alfred, that it's been pretty interesting and pretty broadening."

"Marjie, dear—"

"Now, Anna, *don't* let's go up to bed just yet. Not *just* yet. It *is* so cosy down here, and I'm much too excited to sleep. Just a little while. I—I want to visit with Alfred a little about my life in Tahulamaji." The atmosphere in the living room grew subtly electric. The minister sat rigid. But the speaker went on in a cheery, simple way: "Just think, just think! When you would be sitting down in your nice house in Ohio, there I was. . . ." She interrupted herself with a laugh. "It does sound rather dreadful, now doesn't it? You in Ohio and me. . . . Fancy my going way off there alone—for you know the Tahulamajians were once cannibals! —all by myself, and—and *living!* Gracious, how extraordinary it does sound!"

She rocked with folded arms and peeped at her brother-in-law out of the wicked corners of her eyes.

"But it's such fun," she went on, a little solemnly, "keeping your personal life all ship-shape—all ship-shape, Alfred—and yet really feeling, as you go along, that you're not missing a single thing that's worth while. No, not a single blessed thing, Alfred. When I went to Tahulamaji I hadn't an awfully clear notion of what I was going to do there. You see I thought I'd just have a look-around, as we say. Oh, Alfred," she chatted, "such a lovely spot! So warm

and tropical, with music at night over the water. . . . Alfred, how you would love it there!"

He shifted uneasily, and she went on: "What I did, though—what my life in Tahulamaji really turned out to be—wasn't after all very poetic, or even essentially tropical, when it comes to that. Yes, I've often thought I might have chosen a more harmonious vocation. But one must grasp what one can and be content. The fact is, Alfred, I went into the drygoods business."

"Drygoods!" cried her sister.

"Yes—just think of that—and after all the really exciting things I've done in my life! But that's exactly what I did, Anna. Yes, that's what my life was in Tahulamaji. And you've simply no idea how the thing took! The natives, you see, were just beginning to wear clothes—regular clothes, I mean, dear brother. And in a few months I had an establishment— an *establishment,* I tell you, with departments and counters and clerks. . . . It was perfectly beautiful to see them skipping about, and the little cash boxes running on their tracks overhead. . . ."

"Marjie, *really?*"

"Yes, indeed. Of course that came just a little later on, after electricty had been introduced. The arrangement was somewhat crude, but it worked. Anna, you've no idea the things you can do if you really set your heart on them! Yes, in time we even had cash boxes overhead, and there was I, up in the

cage where all the cash boxes went to, making change and keeping the books! That's what makes me laugh so, when I think of it: you living in your nice house in Ohio, and me up in the little cage with the cash coming in by trolley!"

"Marjory, Marjory!"

"The third year I had a dressmaker over from San Francisco, and the business trebled at once. The poor dears had been trying to make their own clothes, but of course they didn't know much about styles. I had a circulating library of pattern books, but it was a great day, I tell you, when the dressmaker arrived! They closed the schools, and a reception was held. Even the Queen came down the line! I have a manager now," she concluded, "running the business. I said I simply had to get off for a rest. Alfred," she soared to her climax, "your sister has worked herself weary and rich. How much will the new parish house cost?"

The Rev. Needham gasped. This is really not an exaggeration. He gasped—and it was, this time, no merely inner gasping, either. Marjory—the new parish house . . . !

"Why, Marjory!" he cried, his heart deeply touched. There sounded again here that former note of appeal or even pathos.

Nevertheless, long afterward, when the fine new parish house was all finished, and the church could hold its own a little while longer in a world which was changing so rapidly, a grim spectre stalked

between the minister and her magnificent donation. It was the spectre of the Bishop whose bed she had seen made up. Did Marjory think *he* would sleep on two mattresses, like the Bishop? And buy an upper for his golf sticks?

Miss Whitcom had risen to bid them good night. The indignant cottage lamp had begun to sputter and fail. It had never before been kept burning so late. But she lingered long enough to give them the full benefit of one of her delightful and so characteristic shafts of bluntness.

"O'Donnell," she said, "has stood by all these years. Think of it! Think of its taking so long as that to be sure! Of course it wasn't that I ever cared two straws for anybody else. O'Donnell's never had any active competition, except from my overwhelming notions about being free to work out my life. Well, I've had my freedom, and I've worked it out. And now—well, he's asked me again—tonight. But what do you think? I haven't given him a definite answer yet—not *yet!* I'm going over to the Elmbrook Inn as soon as the sun's up, though. I guess I'll stand down under his window and call out to him softly. And when he comes to the window, I'll say: 'Barrett, I've had my fling!' Alfred — you don't think I could find my way through tonight . . . ?"

"Marjory! Of course not! Tomorrow, if you must. . . ."

But she chattered gaily and unquenchably on. "I don't know how it's all going to turn out, I'm sure —about our future, I mean. You see, if he'll come along to Tahulamaji, I'll sell him a half interest in the business, and we could let the manager go. But I doubt if he'll do it. It's so far, and then, you see, he's been with the Babbits so long. I can fancy one's growing very much attached to the Babbits!"

"And if he doesn't want to go to Tahulamaji?" asked her sister.

"If he doesn't? If he doesn't? Well, then I'll have to follow *his* lead."

The Rev. Needham had a sudden flash of wholly disorganizing inspiration. "Marjory, you don't mean Babbit & Babbit?"

But it was just exactly what she did mean! "Yes, in that case I'll travel for Babbit & Babbit. Must be doing something, I can tell you, with all these parish houses to be built! And it won't be my first job on the road, by any manner of means, either!"

Then she kissed her sister affectionately on the mouth and her brother-in-law affectionately on the cheek. And then the cottage lamp went out.

8

WHEN Hilda went up to bed she thought Louise already asleep, for she lay there with her eyes closed. Hilda undressed as stealthily as possible, and crept in beside her sister. At first she felt so excited that it seemed to her she must surely lie awake all night. But as a matter of fact, her eyes drooped at once, and in five minutes she was asleep.

Then it was that Louise stirred and opened her eyes. They were very wide and very full of perplexity. She had not been sleeping, but had feigned sleep because she dreaded the ordeal of talking. She wanted to be alone, and she wanted to think—all night. A feverish zeal was upon her.

Barry was abed too. His light had gone out and his room was quite silent. Was he asleep? She wondered. Or was he, too, lying there in the dark with eyes wide open, thinking?

The walk back from the roast had been a very silent one. The day had been crowded with emotion, and during the journey back to Beachcrest the tenseness had seemed, curiously, to be eased a little. At least there seemed a tacit understanding that, whatever the further developments might be, tomorrow must do. Tomorrow, tomorrow! Tonight

all was hazed and half drowned in unshed, groping tears. Even emotion itself, through sheer, blessed weariness, was subtly obscured. So the walk had been silent, while somehow both had felt as though the air had cleared a little. It was easier to breathe.

They had stood together a moment on the porch.

"Goodnight," she said huskily.

"Goodnight, Louise," he returned gravely, giving her hand just a frank, brief pressure.

She wanted to throw herself at his feet. The impulse to do something splendid and expiating swept over her almost irresistibly. She wanted to implore his forgiveness—would that set their lives in order? If this were to be the end, she felt there ought to be something at least vaguely stupendous about it.

"Louise, dear—what is it?" he asked, quite tenderly and calmly, yet with an intensity, too, which seemed like a hot, reproachful breath against one's very soul.

She swayed a little, almost as though she might be about to fall in a faint. He touched her arm gently.

The opportunity passed. "It's nothing," she murmured. "I'm tired, that's all—so tired!" And she did not throw herself at his feet, or do anything splendid at all.

It was true, she was very tired. She expected to drop at once into a merciful drugged sleep. It had been like that after the affair with Richard. But now, lo! she found herself more wide awake, it seemed, than she had ever been. The weariness seemed all

slipping from her, and her mind grew quite vibrant, as with a slowly dawning purpose.

Ah, tomorrow!

Would the situation be as tragic then? Could it be otherwise than tragic? But perhaps—perhaps they would see things more clearly. . . .

"Yes," she thought, "I'll go to sleep now and let tomorrow bring what it must."

Mañana, mañana!

But this was not to be. She closed her eyes. She tried to turn into a snug and sleepy position. But she could not woo sleep; and every effort merely sharpened her senses. Again she found herself lying in the dark with wide eyes, and went on thinking, thinking.

What was the meaning of this strange commotion? Phantoms—of the past—presaging phantoms endlessly to follow. . . . At dawn she had gone out blithely enough to welcome her lover. He had come. And then. . . . But even before his coming, that curious battle had set in. Not his hat or the twist of his profile. . . . Phantoms. Phantoms rising up in her heart like some sinister cloud of retribution. And their single adversary: "You are mine, all mine. . . ."

Now, in this sombre hour shunned by sleep, the conflict achieved an effect of climax: she felt it to be that, obscurely yet with a desperate poignancy—felt that an issue precious in the scheme of her unfolding destiny faced decision. Legions of spent loves went

by in marshalled battle trim. With an inward cry she watched them as they passed. Perfume still lingering in the house, though with the guest departed. Ghosts of a many-vizaged passion, homing at length, for the fulfilment of a barter Faust-like in its essence.

How lavish she had always been: how free! Shambles, now the glamour was gone stale. A monstrous cheapening—a heart flung out to-let in a public street. Yes, how easily and extravagantly she had spent herself—a profligate spending, for what the moment could return. Here, at last, was a love that demanded: "You must be mine, all mine—you must belong to me forever!" Curious, that of them all—of all the voices that had spoken of love before—it should be Lynndal's which, in fancy, thus first framed a so momentous contract!

He had been always so modest; in the beginning, to be loved in return had figured for him as a too, too generous conjecture. Gradually, however, there had been a return. Their lives had drawn together. The fact that this love had, from almost the very beginning, been challenged to the bridging of such distance began to assume for Louise a new and arresting significance. There had been something in it, in its very fibre, rising above any mere convenience of contact: a phenomenon unique, it struck her, in the long and turbulent history of her heart interests. Those letters. . . . "That was just it," she had groped when confronted by Aunt Marjie. Romancing appeared to have carried her far, how far! Mirage.

And yet, behind the mirage a something deeper lurked. She sensed this now; but all the weary day she had sensed it also, dimly. Lynndal. Hitherto, the man himself had barely figured. Yet ever he had been there, too. He had come from far in the west to put a ring on her finger, and had found her in a panic of goblin doubt. That fancied voice in the shriek of steam: "Mine—mine!" Then the kiss which exposed her dilemma. But *behind* these things—the man; the man himself. And what was this that seemed for so long, in a fine and utter silence, to have been building? Sanctuary! . . .

Her mind, as she lay here in the dark, became indeed a battleground for this ultimate climax of struggle. An unimagined realm they made of it. Her heart beat faster and her cheeks grew hot. To-let, in a public street. "Richard! I have done what he would have done—what he did! I am no better —no better!" She writhed, and the bitterness did not leave her—carried her instead to a yet more awful conclusion: "I am no better than a—than a—" The terrible word scorched across her heart, leaving a scar behind. Sobs shook her body, and the tears were bitter tears of hopelessness and regret.

But then, slowly, the bitterness eased a little; and, full of amazement, she felt a shy presence of freshness stealing mysteriously in, as from some empire where struggle is no citizen. A strange and beautiful sense of disentanglement. In the previous moment of unwithheld relentless purgatory, she had caught

the rhythm of that something—that something behind the mirage! So that, in time, as she lay relaxed, with tears undried on her face, it came to her that just one fact remained, of all the febrile facts which, out of a long inglorious past, had attained the immortality of ghost-hood. Just one—one "living" fact: Lynndal!

Until today he had but filled a niche—but carried on the pattern of the many; now, however, the power to stem this ruinous tide revealed itself as at hand, just waiting to be seized—the courage to give herself completely, and to achieve a love as steadfast and unchanging as his had proved to be.

The night wore on. The moon grew sleepy and drooped in the starry western sky. But Louise did not sleep. There was high drama in her heart, and she could not sleep till it was all played out.

She began laying plans. What would her life be like if she married Lynndal? Dry-farming. But later he would run for Congress—perhaps he would be Governor some day. And in the meantime, love—and there would perhaps be children. . . . Security! Peace! An anchorage—something to steady her and set her wayward heart at rest!

"I'm the kind of girl," she told herself, with a grimness which still went hand in hand with the orgy of honesty and fearless insight that had been making these dark hours so memorable, "—the kind that *must* be married. I—I'm not safe otherwise—not to be trusted."

And then her mood lightened again a little and grew grimly whimsical: "They say a minister's children are always the worst!"

She must have fallen into a little sleep; for she opened her eyes with a start and gazed up at a slight abrasion in the shingle roof through which morning blinked. For a moment she wondered why she had waked so early. The July birds were all aflutter outside. It was a radiant summer dawn.

Hilda lay beside her, sound asleep. The house was very still. It was tomorrow!

Downstairs on the mantelpiece in the cottage living room the Dutch clock was ticking in its wiry, indignant way. There came a whirr—*so* like a wheeze of decreptitude. And then it struck: one, two, three, four. . . .

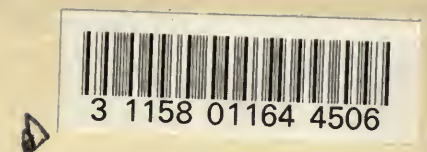
Very quietly Louise slipped out of bed. She did not want to waken Hilda, but she had a sudden desire to be out under the sky.

Quickly putting on her clothes, she stole from the cottage. The morning was very still and fresh. She felt as though she must shout the gladness that was in her. Tomorrow! Who could possibly have foreseen that it would be like this?

Louise climbed up out of the valley toward the little rustic "tea-house" where Leslie had waited for her yesterday at dawn. She thought she would sit there a long, long time, trying to realize her great new contrite happiness. She reached the door. A

figure stirred. Lynndal was there. He had risen even before she was awake, for slumber had not come to him at all. When he saw her face, he could not believe the new happiness that seemed rushing upon him out of the dark chaos of their yesterday.

She stretched out her hands to him. She snuggled up against him with a brief, glad sigh. "I want to be yours, all yours, Lynndal," she said softly and just a little humorously. "I want to be yours forever and ever. I don't want to belong to any one but you!"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